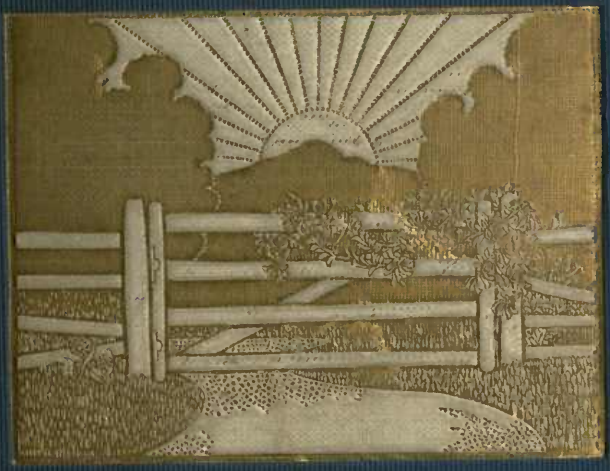
THE MEASURE OF LIFE



FRANCES CAMPBELL

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BY

FRANCES CAMPBELL

AUTHOR OF

"TWO QUEENSLANDERS," "A PILLAR OF DUST"

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TO

LADY ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL

I OFFER THESE SPIRITUAL ADVENTURES,
THE BEST OF WHICH WERE INSPIRED
BY HER, OUT OF A KNOWLEDGE GREATER
THAN MY OWN

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THE MEASURE OF LIFE

THE SCARECROW

WHEN I open my window in the morning, I look out on the snow of spring, the scattered bloom lying heavily on the apple boughs, faintly pink; the pear and plum and cherry, peach and nectarine, against the red-brick wall, pressed flatly crimson along its length.

On the top of the wall brown and yellow wall-flowers bloom, flinging their sweet odours on the whistling gales. The oak is covered over with bronze, the chestnut casting off all its brown satin coverings and putting out little spires of tightly folded green, tipped with invisible coral.

The cedar tree spreads a romantic shadow, darkly violet on the grass; the pine rushes up over the margin of the river, between its level spreads of vivid green; and a walnut tree, gauntly bare, stands between me and the feathery greenness, light and airy, of the willows along its verge.

All along that wide stretch of ground I can see

the cloud-shadows chase the sunshine over the purple-brown of the furrowed fields. The sun shines on it gaily; the storms come up and burst across it, the low clouds trailing in vapoury grey on the serried lines of faint vegetation. One long space, running parallel with the hedge, is completely bare of greenness, and over it wavered from time to time a small, grotesque figure, impossible to distinguish from such distance.

And ever and anon, through rain and shine, came a burst of childish song, clear and shrill—just two lines of an old familiar tune. I think I have heard it all my life. It is the very first of all my recollections, sitting by the fire in an old Irish house and listening to its mystic note. I have heard it in France in a convent garden, on an atoll in the Pacific, in a hut in the jungle in Java. It is the oldest melody in the world, and belongs to a time when the world was young. It is a wild music—full of mysterious suggestion. It makes me think of an air that strikes hotly on the cheek, the sound of flutes played softly, and the fragrance of tuberoses. Odd to hear it wafted on the freezing wind of early spring, across the pear and apple blossom, within sound of London town!

Yesterday the sun shone warmly all day long; last night it snowed. This morning the wind blew

from the north-east, bitterly cold, from a blue sky all frilled with great indigo-coloured clouds, bursting with icy rain.

I saw the clouds sail along the furrows, sweeping over the horizon, scattering the nesting birds before them like withered leaves, driving past my windows in a tempestuous downfall, chill as ice.

And through it all came the little song—just two lines—again and again. I went out and sought the singer.

I found him on the patch of bare ground which had been but newly sown—a tiny lad in a tattered coat down to his bare heels, an old straw hat pulled over his scarlet ears, and a ragged handkerchief tied to a long stick in one purple hand.

But his eyes, wide and bright, were happy enough, though his face was almost blue, his lips blanched to whiteness with the bitter cold. He stopped in his walk between the furrows every now and again to dance in the wet soil and sing his little song—

> "Fly away, little burds, till the blade springs full,
> The sun is shinin' wonnerfool!",

He put his hands to his mouth at the end and made such an outcry that all the birds in Christendom must e'en have taken flight had they heard it. I looked over the hedge and saw the heap of ashes

where the hedger had made his fire, saw my way, climbed across, and stood beside the Scarecrow.

He was such a small, pathetically cheerful Scarecrow that my heart went out to him at once. "You be trespassin'," he assured me joyfully.

I said I did not mind if he did not, whereat he laughed, and sang his little song once more. I asked him why he chose such weather to rival my friend the blackbird.

He gripped at the wet soil with his purple toes, and sang again, dancing merrily. "They dratted sparrers don't be mindin' the weather much," he remarked. He bellowed loudly, and certain adventurous sparrows fluttered wildly past us on the gale. And with them came down the rain, blotting out the long furrows, and surrounding us with the fragrance of daffodils, sweetest of pure chill scents. The very breath of spring. Brentford is always full of the breath of daffodils in the early months. One cannot see them, but can always divine their presence near. They are there in crowds—fields of them, acres of them; daffodils in orchards, in back yards, in old walled gardens, rising like last year's sunshine returned with the perfume of last year's lost happiness.

The rain shut me in with the little Scarecrow. It beat in our faces and ran in torrents from our

hair. It made little pools round our feet, and pelted in our ears. Cold, cold rain.

"Oh!" cried the Scarecrow, sorrowfully, "you do be gettin' wet! Stan' behin' me, an' I'll keep some off."

I followed him down the flooded furrow, stood while he danced, and went on while he sang. Said I—

"How can you go on singing that when the sun is nowhere visible?"

"But he shone yestidy," retorted the Scarecrow, with a merry eye. "An' like enough he'll be shinin' termorrer——"

"Pray," I inquired, "is this a paying occupation? How much á week?"

"Eighteenpence," said the Scarecrow, happily. "Lot o' money, ain't it?"

"Riches!" I agreed enthusiastically. "Tell me, what would you do if somebody gave you fifty times that much?"

He pondered on this, after his song and dance, while the rain descended and beat on us both.

"There ain't that much money in Brentford," he said, with a regretful eye.

I sought in my wet pocket and found half a crown, with which I immediately presented him. He bit it carefully, keeping an eye on me the while, and waving the ragged flag lest the sparrows should take advantage of his preoccupation.

"What's it for?" he demanded sturdily.

"Keeping the rain off," I assured him.

He pondered over that, and thought it would serve.

"I kep' a good deal off," he considered thoughtfully.

He disposed of the coin in some mysterious receptacle in his tattered garment, while the wind wound its long tails about his bare legs, and he sang lustily.

"What will you do with it?" I questioned.

"How much tea an' terbaccer can yer get for this much money?" he asked, touching himself eagerly.

I told him what I thought, and he beamed like a disguised Cupid, slapping his wet sides joyfully.

"Anything for yourself?" I went on. "What would you like best?"

"I like a big rattle," he responded instantly, "to fright them dratted sparrers!" And he bellowed at them again like a bull of Bashan.

"Hadn't you better go home?" he suggested; "you're pretty wet, you know."

I ploughed my way back to the hedge, found the narrow fence joining it to the bridge, and got over on the towpath.

There a thought struck me, and I called back, "Who is the tea for—and the tobacco?"

"Granma," he shouted, "an' Granfer—they both be bad with rheumatiz."

"Good-bye, Scarecrow!" I returned.

He danced in the splashing furrows. "You're not so bad yerself," he bawled on the screeching gale. "Wi' all that 'air flying loose—they will kid you goin' back."

"Come with me," I entreated, "and keep them off;" but he went down the furrows dancing and singing as if there were no such things as cold and rain in the world—

> "Fly away, little burds, till the blade be full,
> The sun is shinin' wonnerfool!"

And all at once the sun shone out, golden and triumphant; the river ran like glass. The thickset hedge was dusky coral hung with scintillating gems. The old tower stood up against a sky of deepest ultramarine. All the trees were covered with a veil of palest shimmering green. The far-off heights came near—pure lapis lazuli. All the songbirds shouted melodiously, and off the gleaming furrows came the familiar refrain. Oh yes! he was wonderful—even for a scarecrow; and I am sure that so long as he lives, and where'er he may be, the sun will shine wonderfully in his heart.

A SARONG OF TRENGGAM

THE bungor tree quivered in the sunlight, its leaves a tremulous play of pale-green light, its blossoms clustering fires of deep purple, the branches flames of pale silver, and its smooth trunk a pillar of white heat.

It stood above the red-walled river where the water rushed, a mirror of glass—silent, fierce, irresistible—beneath the arch of the low bridge, and vanished in the forest. Above, the sky reached high and infinitely blue. Afar on each side lay the forest, motionless in the noontide heat, all greenish-grey, with here a blaze of pure scarlet, and there a mist of mauve. All silent, motionless, remote—no faintest susurration, no whisper from wandering winds. It was as if I sat in a world uninhabited but for me. And with the silence I was conscious of a something that only comes near the soul when it is utterly alone.

The sweet, haunting fragrance of the bungor-flowers floated out on the air like incense burning at a hidden high altar in the mighty aisles of a vast cathedral. A strange thought came to me—that if

I could find that altar, the boon I so craved might not be denied.

I looked from the hastening waters of the river, and saw beside me in the shadow of the bungor tree one whom I had known in days gone by. Then he had been a great and powerful prince; now he was a mendicant priest. He had made the Great Renunciation. Had left his palaces, his riches, his pleasure, luxuries, and kin, so that none of these might come between him and his preparation for the Hereafter.

His goings and comings no man might know. Like the wind, he was there; like the wind, he was gone. His was a more than mortal power, for he could read the unspoken thought, and because of his sufferings nothing was hidden from him that was good to know. He sat silent, regarding me with strange, bright eyes.

His patched, yellow robe hung faded and thin around him, his emaciated hands clasped on his staff, his thick hair flowing around his thin face. He answered my heart.

"No man," he said slowly, "may have to-day's feast and to-morrow's song."

"But why not?" I asked, my eyes returning to the fleeting mirror of black glass between its confining walls of red. "If he live to-day and wakes to-morrow?"

"It is ordained," answered the priest, "that he who feasts at sunset shall not sing at dawn. With this instant we buy the next. For everything a price. It is the Law."

"For beauty and wealth, O Holy One!" said I, "there is no law, nor doth he who thinks with the Persian regard it. What if he say:

> "'One thing is certain, and the rest is Lies—
> The flower that once has blown for ever dies.'

What then?"

"Beauty and wealth," pronounced the deep, unimpassioned voice from beneath the shade, "are but honey on the edge of a knife—when the sweetness is gone from the flesh, the knife bites deep through bone and sinew, piercing the soul; what availeth jewelled hair or painted eyes, the clash of the cymbal or scented garments, if the soul is bleeding within and naught can stay its agony? I know the Persian. What if, like wind along the waste, he gathers wisdom till he teach again with more knowledge? None but the fool is utterly accursed."

"Holy One, who is the Fool?"

"He who takes the moment as by right and calleth it his own, destroying the thing that prevents his gratification, or that, perhaps, which ministers to it; he who is without thought or care or compassion, whose sole desire is himself, into whose heart the

Eternal looks and sees it full, with no room for aught beyond self;—that man is the fool—be he beggar by the wayside or the king upon his throne."

"Is the fool to blame because he is a fool?"

The silence came near and listened for his reply; I had a thought that the river was grasped tight within my two hands; and for all my strength it flowed the same—swift, terrible, and strong—away from me to the impalpable shadow of the infinite.

When I lifted my eyes again I saw the priest sat holding out a wonderful sarong of fine stuff. In it were blended all marvellous primal colours and half-tints: the amethyst of the mountains at evening, the rapturous vermilion of the dawn, the sheeny green of the paddy-fields at noon, the red of the ruby and the darker flame of living blood, lavender grey, the blue of the sky, the green of the sea where it shoals over coral, and the deeper sapphire where it sinks to depths unknown. Crossed with gold, shot with silver; the sarong gleamed and shone in the flickering sunlight from between the roof of leaves.

I took the cloth, speechless with wonder, and laid it, a flame of woven splendour, across my knees.

I forgot the speeding river, the purple glooms of forest and the fate of the accursed, to gaze upon its sparkle and brightness, when suddenly it lay changed, a fine cloud of wavering grey—flat and monotonous

—with incoherent design and broken weft, knotted warp, and marred edge.

"Holy One!" I cried in dismay, "what is this thing? Is this the Cloth of Dreams?"

"Not so, Beloved!" he protested, with bright, shadowless eyes on mine. "But the web of a life. Nor is the brightness gone. It only waits the light. Give it to me."

He took the sarong back, and held it up, glowing, and shining in the sun. "Hearken now," he said: "to each one of us is given at the beginning no more than the grey yarn and the loom. Therewith must we weave a garment to clothe ourselves. After—and the garment is Life—what we make will determine our state when it is done. The king cannot sit down with the sweeper. Yet kings may weave garments that will fit them only for the sweeper's caste, and the sweeper will be clothed like the sun. For see, we must weave our sarong from what others give us on the highway where we ply our loom. Mark well, we have only the grey yarn, the fibre of the beaten flax, and that is not sufficient for a festal garment. Therefore, with great pangs we seek the wherewithal to make it beautiful. Some will give us the Opal of Blessing or the Ruby of Love. And whatever we gain is always in exchange for what we have first given. It is the Law. Fire of sacrifice, reds that are

suffering, abnegation, self-conquest, holy aspirations, repentances, charities—most of all, love and charity—the charity that costs much to the giver. Each traveller along the way leaves a something worthy to be woven in the design if the gift, the gift bestowed upon him, is sufficiently of value. And it matters not if he know its worth and cherish it greatly, or if he fling it in the dust to perish beneath careless feet. The substance left you will be the same; for what you give determines what will be given in return. All is woven in the loom, the shuttle flies till Death comes by, cuts the warp and severs the weft—and the Soul goes forth wearing the garment. This."

He held the long cloth up in his lean, brown hands, flashing like a fabric of strange jewels in the fugitive sunlight, the gorgeous colouring picked out a design marvellous in its clean simplicity.

"This was woven in a Trenggama loom; the weaver was a potter—and a king."

"Like you, had he made the Great Renunciation?"

"Nay, for he was a potter from the beginning; see what this garment of his has become. Yet, like you and me and the Fool of whom we spake, he had in the beginning no more than a handful of grey flax."

"Can one weave such garment for another withal?"

"It is the Law that no one can weave for another,

but always for himself. There is no time for more; wise man or fool, we are allowed but so long for the making of that which will clothe our souls."

Once more my eyes were fastened as by a spell on the swift river within its red walls. Suddenly its surface ruffled in a puff of noonday wind. The bungor tree showered down on me a rain of scented blossoms. All the forest moved and came closer, calling in soft whispers from cool and ferny depths—and I knew I was alone.

THE LOCK OF THE LITTLE SOULS

THERE was a little crowd on the narrow strip of shelving grass by the old mill. A man was thrusting a long pole at haphazard into the water ; a woman with a baby in her arms stood in the middle of the narrow plank bridge and looked down where the glassy blackness of the mill-race broke over the crazy old wheel in a turbulent, bluish foam.

Old Mary Fitzgerald was sitting on the tiller of a disabled barge moored to the mill-quay. Her eyes brooded, dark with dream, on the darkness of the Brent—the still blackness that looks still because of the incredible swiftness of its motion. She never glanced aside at the tumbling walls of the mill, with its mossy bridge, its lichen-grown, red-tiled roof, the ferns and ivy clinging to its shattered windows. Her gaze was on the Brent, that leaps here like some sullen, black-browed woman touched with a sudden frenzy of passion to the arms of her lover, and is lost, after that transient rapture, in dull, drab, monotonous despair, morosely gliding to the larger, deeper stream, to be merged and lost.

She lifted her large grey eyes from the rushing water to look into my face.

"What is it, Mary?" I asked in the Irish; for Mary came, in her old age, to keep her son's children in this place, and has but little English, so she is glad to hear the Erse in this foreign land.

"It is little Owen Budh," she said softly; "he went out to play. You will be lookin' for him, achree?"

"I will be looking for him," I assured her. "Yes; I will bring him back."

"Ah, no!" she murmured, her eyes returning to the glassy water. "You will not be bringin' him back, Murgien Crón, though he had the great love for you."

She was silent at that, and when I spoke again she did not hear. So I left her, remembering that old Mary had times of dream when no one came nigh her.

Slow, silent, black, smooth as a mirror, the Brent flowed between the towpath and the low meadows, reflecting in its mid-stream the high blueness of the spring day, driven across by fleecy clouds. At the sides the radiant greenness of the spring, each little leaf, each twig and spray.

The wind was high, and suddenly cold, suggesting the nearness of snow for all the brilliant sun. It

sang and puffed and gambolled over buttercups and mayflowers, shaking the bloom off the gnarled hawthorns, the petals off the apple and pear. May had lent March a day, and March had sent her this in exchange; yet all its wild playfulness never rippled the Brent for more than a moment of time.

Out there on the towpath the air brimmed with gaiety; there was an endless roundelay in the tall elms, in which each bird was trying its part. The blackbird in the rapture of his artist soul, surrounded by sun and green leaves, started on a keen high note, whistling it again, again, and again, till the heart cried out at its sweetness. Then he all at once burst into a wonderful melody, exquisite in its cadence, falling in perfect time and tune and measured phrase, with the thrush making a full deep second, and the little stone-chaff breaking into the pauses of the wind with his "chip, chip, chip," till the whole choir broke into song simultaneously, and he was lost to the ear.

A barge came down the Brent, hardly breaking the black water. The old grey horse remembered me, and took the narrowest margin as I thrust myself against the quickset hedge to let him pass, looking at me the while with friendly seriousness out of eyes like amethysts drowned in some deep bog pool.

His old master—grey, too, with time and weather —gave me good day, and the wife smiled from beneath her faded sunbonnet, greeting as she went by.

They hardly rippled the dark river; there was no sign when I reached the old lock, deserted now, since the barges go through the canal, that a boat had ever gone through. It is very quiet at the old lock. No one ever comes there. I was alone with the sweet, cold spring day. I sat on the great beam, covered with faded red, with which the huge water-gates are moved. There was a dark, level mirror down below, and into it gushed little waterfalls of palest aquamarine from the crack between the doors. On the left was a row of tall elms swaying and sighing in the wind; between them were glimpses of the silver and golden starred meadows, bordered with tall reeds and sedges. On the right, the emerald greenness of the springing furrows, the purple greenness of the young beet and the pale chrysoprase of springing corn. Before, the river, level and slow, flowing to the bridges of the ancient city, hidden in its windings. And overhead, the high blueness of the sky swept by the rushing wind, singing of the sea; through it the soaring melody of the choir of Love, phrased by the "chip, chip, chip" of the stone-chaff.

"It is a very happy day!" It was a voice so small and sweet that it seemed the thought within

me made articulate by wind and bird and swinging bough, the dripping of water on water.

"It is a happy, happy day!" repeated the voice.

I glanced aside in that lonely, quiet place, green and removed, wondering who could speak like that. A little child with yellow hair and eyes greenly blue sat on the beam beside me in the sunlight. He was a little child, wearing a tattered, pinkish tunic that seemed familiar to me, but there was a strange light over him which made me wonder. I could not be sure of him, for now he seemed in that greenness to be substance, and now merely shadow. Now I thought him like the grass, now the leaf shapes on the trees, and now the reflections from the river. He made me think of the mayflowers, the reeds and sedges, the sallow twigs, and the iris bending in the breeze. Then he smiled, and I knew him. He was little Owen Budh.

"Oh, Owen Budh!" I cried; "'tis glad I am to find you. You must go home with me."

He drew up his little bare knees and clasped his hands around them. I thought he blew sidelong in the wind like a yellow-petalled flower.

"I will not be goin' back any more to that place," he said, with a laugh in his changing eyes. "I will be stayin' here a long while."

"Oh, but," I urged, "your grandmother will be sad for you, Owen Budh!"

"She will not be sad for me," he laughed. "'Tis better here nor at home."

"But tell her why," suddenly said another little voice at my elbow; and I saw before me on the tow-path a slender lad in a quaint dress of changing velvet. A dark little boy, with great brown eyes that smiled in the sun. He held by the hand a tiny baby girl, with curly flaxen hair, who babbled joyfully, swinging herself to and fro. Her long, straight frock was clinging to her little limbs, and her curls lay damply on her baby forehead. Owen Budh's curls were damp too.

"If you look over," he whispered, pointing to the black silence below, "you will see that I cannot go home."

There was a white glimmering in the dark water far below. I could not see what it was, but I knew suddenly why Owen's curls were wet.

"You are not afraid?" questioned the grave little boy in the velvet dress.

I looked at him in the sun, and saw he had on him the emerald and purple of the iris when it blooms in the hot July day.

"Why should I be afraid?" I asked.

"Then we can all come," he cried softly; and his voice was like the echo of the murmuring leaves, as he waved a transparent hand across the lock.

"This is the lock of the little lost children," he explained to me. "There are many of us."

Instantly there was a throng of little children around me, pressing over the narrow bridge, and across the towpath, and on the level grass, peeping from the elms and hawthorn, and among the reeds and flags.

"The river took us," went on the grave little boy. "None of us were happy and our homes were dark."

A little girl with streaming auburn hair placed a tiny hand on my knee.

"We have light now; we are never hungry; and we are so happy."

"We are all happy!" cried the soft baby voices.

The children came nearer, lifting up and down in the wind, their little garments showing all tints of emerald and aquamarine, the greenness of sapphire, the topaz greenness, the verdure of the turquoise. They smiled at me, touching me with hands that were soft like the kiss of the passing wind, caressing me with cool lips that had no touch in them.

"How can you be happy?" I questioned.

The tall girl with the auburn hair swayed her slim body in the sun, and answered me. "We are happy like the trees."

"Like the wind and stars," added the dark boy in the velvet dress.

"Like the birds and the clouds," said Owen Budh.

"The river and the butterflies," said another. "We are part of them all and their joy."

They rose off the level like a flock of butterflies, chrysoprase and golden, and settled on the river above the lock.

"Come again and see us," they cried.

"Good-bye, Murgien Cno!" cried Owen Budh; and his voice was the insistent note of the blackbird I have heard along the river bank. "Good-bye!" The sound came to me that time like a word on a reed pipe played softly in the wind, when one dreams between dark and twilight.

Fiontuin reclined against the rusty windlass, his black eyes laughing at me.

"Oh, Weaver of Dream!" cried I, "was this illusion? Were the children here?"

"The little lost children of the lock?" said he. "They were here, Murgien;" and his pipe sang as Owen Budh had sung to me at Christmas-time.

"They are learning to be happy," he went on to my unspoken thought. "They had but little happiness in their dark houses."

"But must they stay here for endless years?"

"Years!" scoffed Fiontuin; "years are the ropes of sand with which Humanity would bind souls to earth. There are no years. What is Time to Him

who gives an æon to the mark on a bird's wing or the colour of a flower ?"

"And what can these little lost ones learn ?"

"The joy of the blowing wind," said Fiontuin, playing on his little grey-green pipe the while ; "the blossoming flower, the bird's rapture, the happiness of the leaping wave, the drifting cloud, the flowing tide, the peace of all growing, happy, beautiful things. Happiness is the essence of God's self. They must learn before they can go on."

"And we who cannot go out so soon ?" I asked.

"Must learn in blood and tears—in sweat and grime. Beloved, farewell !"

Mary Fitzgerald peered up at me from beneath her hood.

"An' why will ye be weepin', asthore ?" she asked. "For the little life, so near the Heart of Love ?"

And yet I think that Mary wept, even as I did. Though, perhaps, not for little Owen Budh.

GLASTONBURY THORN

I WANT you to come with me and look out on the night. Not the night of this great city, with its roaring streets, and never-ending procession of haunting faces fleeting by no man knows whither; not this swelling vortex of human energy and effort—no! but away far on the downs, among the silent forest folk.

It is very still there, and there is but little light, for the moon is young, a circle of pale gold, with one-half its circumference pressed into the steely indigo of the winter sky. There is a cold radiance from the glittering stars in Orion's belt, and Hesper hangs very low. The silence may be almost felt, yet the night is young; but it is December, and bitterly cold for Christmas-time.

The trees stand gaunt and leafless, holding out bare, long branches to the sky, all covered by a delicate network of small twigs, intricate and fine as lace. Even in this dim, frosty light the vivid vermilion of their forked tips is the dominating note in the frigid silence. The trees stand motionless in

their long avenues, arraying themselves in misty distances where star and moonlight lose themselves in amethystine depths frozen into immutable calm. All the little wild creatures are huddled in nest or burrow or hollow trunk ; it is freezing hard, and the cold brings a merciful torpor with it to them all.

I remember this avenue in the wood in the late summer-time, the path was green as emerald then, and the trees were still resplendent in their sweeping foliage. I followed a ray of sunlight down to this little glade, and saw there an ancient thorn, gnarled and old, with all the summer greenery crying shame on its barrenness. Here, in this small open space, where the bracken is stiff with the sparkle of frost jewels, and the moss shines in the gloom like scattered diamonds—here are larch, and fir, and oak, all stark and stripped. But can this white wonder be the thorn? The moonlight shows forth a miracle! The thorn is burdened with blossom and leaf, the cold air is sweet with the breath of May. It is unmistakable —yet! Well, how can it be? What marvel is this that upholds the sweetness and bloom of spring to the icy winter skies? It is the Glastonbury Thorn, which blossoms for the birthday of our Lord. That is the legend. No need to repeat it here, it is known so well. It may be that the pious monkish scribe who first wrote it down knew in his heart that it had

blossomed thus long years before the Christ-child came, but none the less he showed forth a meaning in its history, that she who runs may yet read plain, for it is the Symbol of the Soul, an epitome of Faith.

The skies are bitter, the wind chills to the very marrow; on every side is blank desolation and death, yet here stands the thorn—triumphant, fragrant, lovely beyond all description—a thing of wonder, so beautiful that unconsciously the mind is filled with reverence and the heart with worship. It is immortal youth, smiling on the grave of the past.

Yet here it stood when Spring walked the earth, and all the wood folk put on their loveliest. The oak had leaves of burnished copper; the larch hung itself with sweet-smelling crimson tassels; and the fir piped like a shepherd on the hills in the wandering airs of May. And it was naked and bare amid them all. Spring is the time of flowers, but it had none; bare in the dim moonlight of December, in the very chill and snow around it, it writes itself a miracle. Let us go! It begins to work. Memory is awaking at the touch of its pale fragrance—bitter-sweet, poignant memory of a vanished spring—a summer fled, when the sun shone warm, and the sweet o' the year was still to come. Does the thorn remember that day—the first warm, lovely day which came clothed like a bride, in a drifting robe of vapoury

white, hung over the tenderest cobalt, with the sunbeams flashing and playing through? It had no buds ready to break their brown coverings at a touch; no green leaves already put forth. It was bare as the oak is now. Unlovely and barren in all the riotous sweetness of the spring.

Did it feel its own ugliness and isolation? Did it fret, think you, against the cruel decree which kept it thus apart, when all nature wore her loveliest robes? Was there wild rebellion and futile beating against the bars of iron circumstances?

Who can tell? No one of us can know, but we must feel instinctively that it was so. But if it was, what gladness must fill it now! Look back! how beautiful it is amid the ice and snow!

So it is with many a human life, and especially with many women. The springtide of life passes by them with niggardly hand, bestowing nothing, while lavishing much on all around. Every pretty, useless, evanescent thing has its bridal crown of flowers, its vernal wedding garment, while they stand, grim and barren, out of all harmony with their world. They cannot respond to the sunshine, to the gracious showers, or the balmy winds. Spring and summer alike pass them scornfully by. Autumn chills and stings them with the reproach of barrenness. Then comes winter with roaring tempest and bitter tooth.

Crimson leaf and golden fruit are alike beaten down and forgotten. There are wild storms, sleet and snow, nipping frosts, and long, silent nights of darkness. And lo! when hope seemed dead and youth perished and gone, the miracle: the snow-white, fragrant blossom and leaf, for Christmas Eve.

So, too, there are natures in whom the sunshine of wealth and happiness awake no soul-bloom. They are so shut up within themselves, so narrowed into their own interests, that they unconsciously absorb all, and give nothing in return. It may be that the second self that lies dormant within us all protests dumbly against its own incapacity, and it may be the protest is unheard. Then comes the winter of suffering and misfortune. The sap rises, the tiny brown buds jut out, and presently there is the bloom filling the icy winter day with delight. We cannot have it all ways. If youth and middle age are bare of flower, the bloom will most surely come to be a December miracle. Some women's souls develop slowly, and put forth all their fragrance when youth is past. But they need the season of dark and doubt and loneliness before the bloom and beauty can mature. And to them what may, perhaps, seem the affliction of the innocent is but, after all, the necessary development of their dormant fruitfulness.

Glastonbury Thorn

It is never a wise thing to shirk pain or suffering or loss. Accept them all as the thing needful to perfection, the winter that so beautifies the barren tree. Poverty, sickness, yearning—all these make up the storm and frosts and forbidding skies of life. But if we look steadily through them to the eternal sunshine of God's face, our souls will be crowned with blossom like the Glastonbury Thorn.

IN THE HOUSE OF OUR LADY OF PITY

THE House of Our Lady of Pity stands in one corner of a silent, old-world square. Once upon a time it was the country mansion of a wild and witty lord, companion in iniquity to a dissolute king, well-nigh as witty, though scarce so wise as himself.

It fronts the square boldly, a mellow expanse of time-worn vermilion, overgrown with lichen, moss, and ivy, its tall windows and capacious porch speaking wide welcome to the passer-by, and to those wanderers who come timidly to its ever-open door, broken by the tempest of life, to hide themselves below its red-tiled roof. The mission of the Sisters of Our Lady of Pity is to those unfortunates who seldom repent, because repentance is of so little avail, since the world will neither forget nor condone their offence. When they are utterly broken, when misery has said its last word to them, when Death whispers at their ear, such of them as know, creep to the arms of Our Lady of Pity, and are comforted by the knowledge that Almighty Love will not look so keenly

into the performance as the intention. "He knoweth all things," say the Sisters, and ask no question of the refugees. Within the roomy old mansion all is immaculately clean and pure. The wide, spacious rooms are full of sunshine, and silent, odorous of incense, scented with flowers from the old-fashioned garden.

In that garden the Refugees love to work; perhaps the first and most innocent of all human instincts is the love within us for the garden, of watching the green things spring and bud and blossom into loveliness. The Sisters of Our Lady of Pity are all women gently born, gently bred; they esteem that old garden as their most powerful persuader back to the paths of peace.

In it grow all the quaint, sweet old-world flowers that our ancestors loved for their virtues or their fragrance. Sweet-william and marigolds, goat's-rue, and the white pinks beloved of hapless Anne Boleyn. Roses, York and Lancaster, cabbage and moss roses; sweet-briar and southernwood, that boys make into posies in my native land for their sweethearts to carry to church; tall orange and white lilies, and all the others of their sweet company.

The Refugees cultivate them all for market, and learn of them the while, and they do many other things, so that they may forget the past in the

making of a future. Among other things they do laundry-work, and it was in the laundry that I first saw wild, passionate, beautiful Perdita.

I only had one glimpse of her then, and another afterwards; but these two will make me remember her always, though not one word of her history is known to me nor yet to any other that I know.

She was standing in the middle of the laundry floor, with the spring sunshine lighting up a tumbled mass of waving hair, her lined face tense with rage, her black eyes blazing with passion. Under her feet was a trampled pile of fine linen, and facing her, with the scarlet imprint of a slender hand on her white cheek, stood Sister Mary John, sweetest, most patient, most holy of all the Sisters.

Sister Mary John has eyes like the grave, questioning eyes of a child; they make one feel abashed, remembering one's knowledge of the world and things in it, because they seem to ask a question to which there is no answer. Yet of all the Sisters she is most beloved.

Perdita returned this questioning, wondering look with rage and defiance for just so long as one might count ten. Then suddenly she flung herself at the Sister's feet and was sobbing wildly, desolately there, as if all repentance were futile and hopeless, the sorrow of one lost.

Over her stooped Sister Mary John, and drew her to her feet, with a whispered word.

There was a long sigh through the wide, airy room, and she gathered up the crumpled garments, trodden in her fierce rage, and went out with hanging head and downcast eyes.

It was in the afternoon, and I had come to Benediction. Benediction in that house is more than ever a sacred mystery—it suggests so much more than it reveals. The little church was once the ball-room. The ceiling is still painted with tiny Cupids, blue-winged and pink, that peer over the cloud-edges on the black-robed nuns and their sad following. The five long windows open on the garden, and the organ is in the musicianers' gallery, quaint, high, and dusky, at the extreme end of the long apartment.

Sister Mary John plays the organ and trains the choir. The singing is always beautiful, but this afternoon it was wonderful indeed, and such as I have never heard since.

The nuns filed silently in, and after them the Refugees : faces darkened with suffering, faces disfigured with vice, with sensual indulgences, pale with desperation, remorse, hopeless longing—the flotsam and jetsam off the ocean of life cast into this quiet harbourage.

High in the carved old gallery Sister Mary John made strange music; a company of nuns on her left, on her right a tall, slender figure, with a thick veil of black baize thrown over her head and face.

I knew it was Perdita; but that veil, for no reason at all, filled me with a vague horror of what was hidden beneath it. The mystery, the remoteness surrounding it, thrilled me curiously. I felt fascinated, yet feared to look.

I turned to the altar and tried to forget the mysterious figure by the organ. The old priest came in, with his two little red-tuniced acolytes, one on either hand. The chill wind of spring was singing its song of roaming among the daffodils and narcissi outside, wafting in, between the puffs of lily-scent and incense, whisperings of wild, tempest-riven seas and driving foam.

The little altar was ablaze with light and covered with white bloom. The priest paused, his quavering old voice dying abruptly. The organ took up a new theme, and out from behind the black veil came a singing like that of seraphs before the Throne—a voice that travelled down unimaginable depths of heartrending entreaty and soared in crystal-clearness to the farthest heights of song.

"Rosa Mystica. Ora pro nobis."

The nuns in their stalls sang, the little girls clustered between the doors, the nuns in the gallery; but every sound was gathered up and swept along in the high triumphant loveliness of that wonderful great singing from behind the baize veil. There was no room in all the wide old house for any other sound.

I could hear it echoing through all the wandering corridors, in all the sunny rooms where wits and roués, beaux and belles had been used to gather, to gamble and pay each other compliments, to plot and plan and make assignation. I could picture their *blasé* shades, rushing noiselessly down the great carved staircase or peering wonderingly over the twisted bannisters, listening to that irresistible flood of melody. So it swept on.

"Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi."

The words soared away up to a vast height of supplication, sweet with entreaty, overflowing with passionate sorrow—a remorse so keen that its edge cut to the listener's very soul—sweet beyond all description, unspeakably miserable.

It broke on that great high note into a wild, harsh cry, almost horrible in its despair, the inarticulate expression of a crucified heart.

Sister Mary John reached forth her right hand and laid it on the singer's arm. She fell with her

head buried on the nun's knees, and the organ burst into a swelling strain, carrying the litany on—

"Christe, audi nos!"

And Perdita lay still across the nun's knees, as of old Magdalen lay on the Master's feet, and I remembered that this was the House of Our Lady of Pity—and was glad.

PALINGENESIS

ELINOR'S garden is shut away from the outside world by high walls of old red-brick, covered by fruit and rose trees. It is a strange old garden—here, like some fragrant wilderness, overgrown, mossy, and sweet; there, spread into velvety lawns and quaint old parterres, little rose-grown arbours and trellis-walks—a delightful place to think in, to muse in, to be glad or sorry in. It is very like Elinor.

That kind of garden takes some centuries to make; it is almost as complex as a highly organized temperament in a beautiful body. In that respect it reminds me most of its owner, for she and her loveliness are almost as indefinable as the garden. In it there are many soft, mossy paths edged with box, and bordered with all manner of sweet-smelling, old-fashioned flowers and herbs, that lead nowhere. Perhaps one follows them eager and expectant, and arrives in the asparagus-bed, or among the melon-frames. But, as Elinor would point out to you, the asparagus is like a cloud of feathery, misty sunshine,

that has strayed and been forgotten; and beyond the melon-frames, the cabbages stand out against the dark soil in wonderful tints of absolute blue. It had occurred to me on various occasions that cabbages were really blue; but one has not the courage to mention these things—it is flying in the face of accepted tradition. So something was gained by following that narrow, green walk.

But, on the other hand, one may wander in Elinor's garden and come on a sight so beautiful that it haunts the mind for weeks after—just as her strange silences and little monologues do. Her thoughts are strange thoughts, for a woman worshipped and cared for as she has been, wrapped about by love from the lightest wind, with all the gratifications that wealth and position can bestow, that great personal charm and beauty, together with a golden heart, great sympathy and goodness can claim. Her slow, noiseless ways; her soft voice, pensive and clear, with its sudden notes of deep passion; her love of pale tints and filmy laces, and the changing lights in her deep blue eyes;—all fit into the old garden as parts of the picture. I sometimes wonder if her ancestresses, who walked in it through three centuries, were any one of them so picturesque and charming as she.

Her life is permeated by a passionless calm, a

soft peace and dignity that seem very strange to those who know she is a great artist. It is all so curiously out of proportion in itself, for there is no suggestion of struggle in her or her surroundings. Her career as a painter has been success from the beginning. She has genius; but genius, as a rule, does not flourish in the sun. It demands sterner climatic influences. I wondered how it had grown and been nourished in the garden, till yesterday, when I went out in the dusk and walked with Elinor in the luminous afterglow that precedes the night. The sun had gone down on a stormy day; the wind had been in her garden and strewn it with golden leaves. We went down to the very end and stood by the ivied wall, looking away over the cloudy asparagus to a wide expanse of sky, saffron dying into dull ochre, barred by long wisps of fine scarlet cloud—dull, uncannily far off, and yet low. The violet mists rising off the flower-beds seemed to reach to the top of the wall and meet the sky amid the thinning leaves. Already the bare outline of the trees was showing, slim and graceful, amid the encarmined foliage.

"This," said Elinor, "is like a fugue by Bach or Scarlatti—crimson and gold and restful harmonies, with a suggestion of past storm and strife. Bach is the musician of middle age. He hushes the memories,

is quiet and full of quaint dignity and subtle sops to emotion. Come away ; let us go to the roses."

Her face showed with the pale clearness of a cameo against the dark furs she wore. She looked like one of the shadows that were supposed to haunt that very path. I laid hold of her to make sure of reality. Something in her perplexed me. In any other woman I would have recognized it at once. But in Elinor it was absurd. Something unfamiliar, obscure ; there was a revelation of tragical strength and tenacity about her that took my breath away.

Down the nut-walk, under the hazels, past the old yew that was no longer young when Oliver Cromwell stood beneath it to interrogate Elinor's ancestors and namesake concerning the White King, on till we came to the glory of the rose garden, the arch of sweet maiden's blush, all fragrant with a late glory of pale blossoms.

"This tree," quoth I, "thinks it is June. Yet there is a difference. What is it ? What makes the difference between the rose of October and the rose of June ? "

"The difference is," mused Elinor, softly, "that June is the rose, and October the soul of the rose—its embodied ghost."

"Have roses souls ? "

"We all have souls. You will call that Pantheism,

to share one's soul with the things that grow out of the kindly earth. But for all that, I am very conscious of it sometimes, and never so much as in this month of the year—the twilight of the year, when Nature settles down to a long introspection. As for the June rose, I do not care so much for it. It is too blatantly conscious of its youth and beauty. But this! Look at it! *It is human.* Do you see its pathos? Look past the outward perfection and colour and fragrance, and you will perceive that it blooms too late. It is too ethereal, too perishable. It is the likeness of love come too late. It is the remembrance of a power unrecognized till it was gone. It is an image of longing—regret. Gather your October rose and it is shed, its petals are only held together by the memory of past warmth and sunshine.

"Cruel as the grave," says the Old Book. Did you ever ponder on the cruelty of life? Bitter life! that takes all we treasure. Cynical life! that leaves us only that which must be endured. Death, it seems to me, spares the things too light for it, too small for immortality, and thrusts them into our arms while they ache for the things he tears away. It is strange that the best of us in us can only blossom in the autumn. We plant it in June and water it with tears of poignant anguish and despair. The

unspeakable sorrow of youth. Then comes the long time of "Between," when we have lost all and gained nothing; when we hang our heads in the sun of full summer, flowerless and bare of all but the dusty foliage that goes to hide our pain; when we bear the burden and heat of the day in silence. On the verge of our winter comes the second blossoming—the October Rose of Life. Its beauty, its charm, are all undeniable—but not of this world. Beauty is always sad, but the October rose is the saddest of all sad things, because we know it is Palingenesis—the flower of a dead happiness raised from its grey ashes, purged of all passion, all humanity, all hope.

"What is it the Persian said so long ago? 'All changes into fire and fire into all—as wares into gold and gold into wares.' The October bloom of many a woman's days is raised in its loveliness out of the hell-fires that once raged within her. Do not be shocked! It is the special ordeal of woman, that as she brought hell into the garden, so must she look once in her life out of the garden into the depths of the abyss. We all know it; we all have endured its devouring flames; otherwise there could be no Palingenesis."

She stooped and drew aside the bloom-laden branches, revealing the gnarled and twisted stem from which they sprang. "Who would think," she

went on, "that all this ugliness was hidden beneath the smooth leaves and pale-pink flowers? Look at its tortured convulsions, its crooked twinings. Had it been left to grow as Nature meant, it would have been tall and straight. But convention demanded it should cover this arch. And behold what the iron hand of circumstance, too strong for rebellion, has done. There! Let us hide it again. Being a rose it bloomed just the same, perhaps the better for that inward pain and flame. Women do that too; they are trained to such hideous contraversion of nature, and they cover it up with flowers. First in the June of their lives, when the nightingales are singing in every tree and the world swings abrim with the tide of love. The nights are long and warm, and the garden is full of the light of moon and stars. Then, after the burden and heat, the beauty and charm and fragrance return sevenfold, and every one looks and sees it is only shadow—unreal—illusion.

"No man takes the October rose and wears it on a throbbing heart. It is the bloodless representation of a thing dead. No one quite believes in it; it is illusion, even to itself. Good works, faith, prayer, sympathies—these are the sunshine of the flower that blooms in our autumn, and makes it a thing of beauty in that chilly atmosphere. It assures us of immortality, that in our ashes lies the perfection

of ourselves, instinct for another summer. But those who have eyes remember the fiery flames through which it has come; and perhaps that is well also. It is dark in my garden ; the mauve and golden have sunk into indigo. Let us go in out of the night."

THE SHIP OF HEAVEN

IT was at that strange time in the night when the world no longer sighs in his sleep but lies wrapt in dreams. There are but few sounds in the world at that hour, and these are so small that one must needs hearken for them with the ears of the soul, because they are not made by mortal things, but by what has passed beyond to another plane.

It was a white night; little fleecy clouds had crept unheeded up the pathway of the sky, and fine as gossamer, thin and small, had overhung and covered the moon till the heavens looked like a dome of wavering, shifting white light. Only the yews in the old garden stood very tall and straight, black against the sky, and the poplars whispered softly, though no wind blew among their loose-strung, multitudinous leaves, silver-green and silver-grey in the strange light.

At the bottom of the garden, below the broken marble steps, the river ran, a level reflection of their quivering foliage. Along its sides the sedges and reeds—tall iris and silvery water-lilies—mirrored

themselves in the deep, immeasurable blackness of the slow current. In its centre, where the water seemed to move not at all, the white clouds drifted to and fro, weaving a web of silence over the remote hour.

All my windows stood wide to the June night; I was alone in the House of Tears, save for the deathless shades of departed folk, sweeping up and down the stately staircase, or through the faded glories of the desolate rooms, where once they had feasted amid joy and laughter.

Even as the old house looked out on the warm beauty of the summer night, so did also my own soul, isolate and lonely, where once she had been so surrounded by intimate delights.

A moment had banished me from my peace—only the perfume shaken from the folds of an old garment, the echo of a voice grown cold, and I knew there is no oblivion, the spoken word lives on and travels space for ever. Yet by-and-by, when the storm had overblown, there was again an interval, passionless and serene, when I sat and gazed out on the white night, and in that time my door swung open and one entered.

I knew him well, the Weaver of Dreams—Fiontuin—Master of Illusion. Once, when I was a little child, he found me in the sea-mist that creeps

up the mountain-sides, and kissed me on the brow, on the eyes, on the lips; so that I think his thoughts, and see his dreams, and speak only of those things he knows—remembering always and forgetting nothing. Those whom Fiontuin takes for his own never completely belong to the earth. They are dual, and live two lives—one with him in the kingdom of fantasy, and the other vaguely and uncomprehended in the world.

They are Dreamers and Poets, Singers and Painters, Seers and Saviours—they have the power to feel all things—to make others feel all things, to see and make others see. They laugh and cry, and the world laughs and weeps with them. Yet in their hearts they dwell apart, removed by ineffable, unending sorrow. Great joys are theirs, boundless miseries, infinite delights and sufferings unspeakable. They move the mountains, the song of the lark snatches them into ecstasy, and the prick of a pin brings the agonies of death. This because they belong to the Master of Illusion, and are what he wills. Fiontuin is immortally young; his face is dark and pale, his hair black as night, his eyes are purplish-grey, his lips are cruel, but in his eyes lurks laughter always—laughter and pity, love and pride. All love Fiontuin, but he loves few—and only those who know him for what he is.

He played upon a little pipe, made of a reed from the river—greyish-green it was, as if but newly plucked from its cool roots—and the song was like the cry of the plover, what time it circles under the low sky above the shadowy boglands in the dreadful hour before the dawn.

"Come with me, Ashore," he said. "Come out with me, and I will show you a beautiful thing."

"I am weary of dreams," I cried. "I will go with you no more. I have eaten Dead Sea fruit, and the taste is bitter. I gathered it in the land of dreams. Leave me, Fiontuin; only the white night is truly mine."

"The sun will rise," sang Fiontuin, "in a sky of rose."

"There will be no more sun with me," I thought. "I have spent my life in visions, and disillusion is mine. I am awake, Fiontuin; I will go with you no more. Leave me."

He laughed as he stood before me in the white light, the reed-pipe at his lips, and his white fingers lifting off the holes, in a melody sweet as the sound of the sea on a summer eve when it turns shorewards over the stones. I could hear the slow drops from my own heart as he played, for the song was my own, made on a vanished day.

"Yet come," quoth he, "and I will show you a wonderful thing."

But I would not go. Disillusion was very bitter, and my dream had been the most beautiful dream in all the world. A cruel hand, relentless and vindictive, had taken and dashed it from a great height, so that it lay in fragments. My happiness had become like the fairy money—withered leaves, shrivelled blossoms, an evanescent perfume.

The gossamer clouds drove apart, and the moon looked down on Fiontuin as he stood leaning against the ancient carving on the wall, his eyes like wells of violet light, luminous with pitying laughter.

"Oh, foolish one!" he cried. "Only at one touchstone doth happiness melt away into nothingness and dissolve—and that is gold. Only a child of mine would have weighed love against riches, and looked to see riches touch the beam!"

He laughed aloud. His moods are like the wind; like his laughter the wind came up to him, driving the white clouds before it, billows of snowy foam on a high sea of blue.

"And still," whispered Fiontuin, bending down to me, the little pipe against his crimson lips, "I will show you the Ship of Heaven."

He went across the polished floor, casting no shadow on its slippery surface, his skin-shod feet

making no sound; beautiful, young, immortal he stood in the dark doorway, mocking my sorrow with his tender smile.

Yet I feared to go; for the bitterness of remembered joy, is sweeter than the anticipation of new happiness, because the thing lost has been ours, the other never may be.

He stood glancing over his shoulder, playing on the little pipe such notes of strange, compelling sweetness that I could not choose but go. A great longing sprang up in me to see the Ship of Heaven. Perchance I too might take passage therein; and this even though I knew Fiontuin well, and that his promises were like the vows of love—no more remembered after being spoken.

I followed him through the echoing rooms, down silent corridors where the moonbeams played across the boards in prismatic glimmerings through the cobwebbed glass, down the great staircase where the shadows wandered up and down noiselessly, across the black and white marble of the hall, out into the balmy sweetness of the June night.

The air was heavy with the breath of roses, with the odour of clove-pinks, daphne, and syringa, with honeysuckle; they brought me fresh access of misery, for all these sweetnesses had once been a part of my joy, and poignantly recalled its loss.

Fiontuin laughed again, and the wind hastened to hear him. Close by my side, he took me down between the rows of tall, swaying yews and whispering poplars, where the moonlight came furtively and was lost in the interlacing shadows on the sandy path. Down by the river-edge at the broken steps lay the Ship of Heaven. Her hull was like hot gold, her sides were hung with long streamers of white cloud, her cordage lines of gleaming light, white and fine. Her sails were like the white mist that comes puffing off the sea, full in the scented wind; her decks ashine like polished silver strewn with woven silks and fabrics wrought with jewels. Garlands of amaranth and asphodel hung over her sides, and all such flowers as grow upon the plains of Paradise. Her masts were thin spires of glass; her bowsprit a fine shaft of white light topped by a star. She lay among the reeds and iris, with the willows reaching down to her, a vision of amazing loveliness, a wonder of white fire.

But on her decks was no living soul; no angel looked from her burnished sides; she swung on the reluctant tide, no hand upon the tiller.

"Is there no crew for the Ship of Heaven?" I questioned in perplexity.

Fiontuin laughed aloud, and shook back his long black hair.

"She sails alone," he replied; "and lo! hither come the voyagers."

A little child—a little slender child, in a worn brown frock, came dancing down the pathway from the open doorway of the House of Tears. She was a thin little maid, with wide eyes and flowing hair. Thin and pale she was, and as the moonlight fell through the interweaving shadows about her feet she danced to it, as if it were alive and her playmate. When the wind caught her long hair and spread it out about her, she wheeled and whirled as if the wind were a playmate also. Fiontuin blew a long, keen note as she passed, and I remembered —Remembered her lonely, neglected childhood, shut up in the old house, with no friends save the wind and the trees and flowers, and thought of how Fiontuin visited her and brought her happiness—ah! a long time ago.

She fled along the white gangway that lay between the old steps and the Ship of Heaven, smiling at me as she went, and past me at the throng behind her. After her came a hurrying crowd, strange and motley—men with hard faces and stern lips, women weary and haggard, youths and maidens, old men and bowed old women, and all bearing the marks of conflict, suffering, sorrow, or great poverty; some wearing rich clothes and

precious jewels, all with the same rapt expression, as if they beheld the desire of their eyes and were hastening towards it.

As they passed, Fiontuin played on his reed-pipe; now it was like a mother crooning to the baby at her breast, now it was a woman calling to her lover, now a man's voice, passionate and rich, and now the murmur of a child. He knows all sounds, all words; as he fingers his flute he plays on our hearts, making melody of what is in us.

Silently they passed on the Ship of Heaven till her shining decks were covered.

"Where," I questioned, "on this little river is the Port of Heaven?"

The wind blew out the streamers and the ship flamed on the night like a glory.

"The Port of Heaven," echoed Fiontuin, "lies in each human heart; but the river winds and twines so that only this ship can navigate it."

"But if Heaven lies in each heart, wherefore journey in this ship?" asked I.

Fiontuin put the pipe to his lips and danced to its music as the child had danced to the moonlight. He came near and took me by the hand, and his voice had the sweetness of the blackbird's note in that little dusk that comes after the dawn.

"The ship," he laughed, "they could not go without

the ship, for these are the Disinherited who depend on the charity of my children for their dreams. And the ship is a child's thought. The little child—do you remember her, Avourneen?—who danced. She told the dream to a singer, so that many heard, and it became the thing you see, a vessel, splendid and glorious to carry these, the Disinherited, to their lost kingdom. They will awake, these poor ones, and some will recall the glimpse they had of immortality. Some will remember but a little; some will only be heavy burdened with the knowledge of their dream, but so full of sordid aims that they only grasp after the sweetness of its intangible beauty in vain. What I would ask you; what are riches—the riches you longed for a space since—in comparison with the pure splendour of a child's thought? Is it a less precious thing than a purchased love?

I looked after the Ship of Heaven, with wide-set sails, spreading golden effulgence on the dark, slow waters as it sped swiftly on with its burden of haggard, wretched humanity. All the skylarks awoke and fled heavenwards as the light fell on their grassy nests, thinking the sun had come, so that the ship was heralded by music such as greets the day. The wind puffed after it, swaying the trees and shaking the perfume from each sleeping flower.

"The riches come and pass. Who has them?"

asked Fiontuin. "What brings happiness? Only dreams, only thoughts. All, all is my handiwork. Nothing is real save the thought that frees the soul from its bonds of flesh and sets it voyaging on the Ship of Heaven. There is no reality, save Love."

Afar in the darkness the Ship shone like a star, the clouds came over the moon again, and the night drew white, the wind waxed riotous among the branches and set them swinging wildly; the leaves murmured like heavy rain.

I turned back to the House of Tears, and on the threshold stood a tall angel with folded wings.

"Tell me," I whispered, "where is Heaven?"

"Deep in each heart," said the angel.

"And who may go in?"

"Only the pure."

"Alas!" I cried. "Who is pure in heart?"

"Those who go in by the Gate of Sorrow," he answered; and, as he stood aside to let me pass, I saw in his hand the grey-green reed, and knew him once again.

"Oh, Master of Illusion!"

"Aye!" he laughed, blowing a new note. "All, all is illusion. I have seen all things come and all things pass. There is no reality, save that which is thee. The soul alone, that is thee. Only in dreams is truth, only in dreams is happiness. I govern all

the world; kings and princes, powers and principalities bow before me. I bring their dreams; I am the only Beloved. The best of every heart, of every soul, is mine. Cease to look back on what is lost; it never was thine, else it would be thine still. We can only lose the thing that is not our own. Dreams are best. Send them out like the Ship of Heaven to carry the disinherited. Farewell!"

"Stay!" I entreated.

"Nay," he said; "since thou wouldst still say that if I remained for ever. Farewell, the night calls me!"

I heard his reed-pipe as I climbed the stair among the hurrying shadows and looked out on the garden from my window. Afar, on the edge of the world, glowed a great lone star; I knew it was the Ship of Heaven, with her cargo of weary souls. From the wind-blown trees came the tremulous song of the thrush awaking to a new day.

"FOR AS THE SOUL DOTH RULE"

IT was almost dusk when I came to the little bridge and stood for a moment to take in the picture. On the left lay the mirror-like stretch of the reluctant Brent, unruffled and slow, with the barges piled along its lowermost reach, filling up the perspective with smoky browns and dull reds; beyond, the green fields and orchards darkly crimsoning to the coming spring.

On the right lay a wide expanse of cultivated land, bounded along the towpath by a thick hedge of thorns, and running a brief course into the furrows was a tiny branch of the river, crossed by the little bridge on which I stood.

On the edge of the water the hedger had made a great fire of thorns; they blazed up in the dusky atmosphere with a merry crackle, reminding me of the Wise Man's contemptuous simile; beside it stood the hedger, pressing down with his fork a fresh addition to the flame.

He was a tall, old man, stooping forward a little

as if feeling the burden of his age, but bearing it with a contented cheerfulness. His legs were encased in leathern gaiters and his hands in clumsy leathern gloves. His face in the firelight showed ruddy and wrinkled, but the eyes were gay, and the mouth had an upward curve that bespoke an unregretting mind.

His tall, old figure, holding the thorn-fire down at the end of the pitchfork, was outlined against a vague distance of dim violet brown, the colour of the upturned earth, lined in wavering furrows with grey-green, the young vegetables just planted and still drooping in the February airs. The hedges melted away into warm mauves and dim browns and reds, as if the fields were some illimitable steppe heaved up against a mysterious sky full of drifting pearly cloud, slow as the dreaming river.

A woman came out of the obscurity behind the fire and stood beside him without speaking—an old woman, dressed with a tidiness that was almost exquisite. Her curt petticoat showed a pair of small slender feet in Lancashire clogs. Her thin bosom was crossed by a tartan shawl, the ends tucked into her belt. There was a white kerchief round her shrivelled neck, and a black sunbonnet on her thick white hair. Her features were fine and regular, and her eyes sweet with content; her expression

such as one sees in the old Italian pictures of the Madonna.

She had a hoe in one hand, and she leaned against it as she stood, evidently weary after long work on the brown furrows.

The man put one arm around her, and drew her back till her head rested against his shoulder. "Tired, owd lass?" he asked.

"Aye, lad," she said contentedly, "just a bit."

"Well," he told her comfortably, "we'll be goin' now—there isn't more'n a handful;" and he pressed down the crackling thorns on the fire.

"Sit 'ee down," he said suddenly, spreading a sack for her on the withered grass. She sat down, and looked, with her chin in her withered hands, at the glowing fire. The flames leaped over the smouldering redness below, singing, sinking till it was only a heap of drifting ashes, light, almost impalpable, flying on the dusk like fairy snow.

"Ready, Jinny?" He held out a hand to assist her to her feet.

"Aye, Geordie." She lingered, looking on the smouldering pile of burnt thorn. At that moment a blackbird began piping through the dusk from a tree across the river, riotously jubilant, as the blackbird always is when he thinks of spring. "O-o O-o! Lo-o-ove. Joy! joy! joy!"

The woman smiled up in the man's face. "Hark to that!" she said softly; and into her face flashed for an instant all the beauty of her long-past youth.

"He'll be thinkin' of warmer weather belike." The man looked up with a whimsical expression at the tree-tops, and a barge came slowly out of the dusk, its lights lingering down to the river-bed in quivering scarlet lines.

A boy poleing from the sides was singing to himself quietly. The words came sweet and clear as the blackbird's note—

> "I think of Jinny with the light brown hair;
> Her face is in my heart, and I see her everywhere."

Geordie stooped at the sound and touched the old woman's lined cheek with his lips, and she laughed softly as they moved off together across the loose brown loam. It was near the end of their day—a day begun with labour in the fields, and which found them at its close field labourers still—he hedging and ditching; she hoeing, weeding and transplanting—a son and daughter of Mother Earth.

Want had been their portion often. How could it but be so? Poverty always, and unceasing toil. But that thing more precious than crowns or thrones or wealth incalculable, the one thing in all the world that must be given and cannot be bought, was theirs —Love.

"Joy! joy! joy!" sang the blackbird after them. "Ooee! Ooee! Joy!"

There had been a contented joy in the woman's laugh, a deeper content in the man's tone, as they vanished together into the amethystine shadows. I wondered what had kept the joy and content from the dawn of their lives till now that it was so near the night!

I wondered if the simple life is not, after all, the best life, the one that leaves most in the end? Amid the striving after riches, the noise and clamour of countless battle-cries, this quiet happiness in the fields seemed a marvellous thing.

Do riches bring indifference? and power that fulness of gratification which kills desire, and leaves the mind all emptiness? When even the wise have gained all, it brings but loathing. The grasshopper is a burden; the cistern holds no water. Boundless desire brings but the illimitable melancholy of satiety.

The day's work brings the day's happiness, the night's deep slumber and content. The primeval curse was also the primal blessing. The best of all lives is that spent in work for those we love. The idler can never know the sweetness of love gained by sheer worth. His days cannot be brightened by a tenderness unbought, unsought, coming in youth to ask, "Where hast thou been so long?" and making

its home in the heart for aye. The old song had brought to Geordie a vision of what time his Jinny's hair was amber-tinted like the morn, and even I, who knew her not, had seen the beauty of her soul looking forth from its darkened cottage. The mere physical loveliness decays and is no more, even in remembrance, unless that soul-beauty lies behind. Their lives had been spent near the brown earth, with the fragrance of the upturned soil in their nostrils, the growing things ever under their eyes, all the innumerous secrets of Nature told in their listening ear.

The birds' songs, the wind songs, the rain in their faces in sun and shower, they had worked on till the tale of years was almost spent. Presently they would go down together to sleep in the placid bosom of their Mother, and be at rest. Sun and wind and driving cloud would sweep over them, and they oblivious to them all, their time being sped.

"In great wealth," say the Brown People, "is much forgetfulness." Perhaps. It might be possible to remember if one had great possessions, but not very probable. And riches cannot buy love nor yet content.

In the old Morality play Everyman goes down to his grave, having appealed in vain to kinsfolk and riches, strength, beauty, discretion, and wit. All

leave him at the last save Good Deeds alone, who will accompany him to his dread reckoning. But there is one other that must have gone down with him to the "low house"—and that, Love. Love that many waters cannot quench, that is stronger than the grave and victorious over Death.

A little wind came up and stirred the white ashes off the dying fire and covered me with soft flakes of fine ash. It reminded me somehow of a story beloved in my childhood—

"Snip, snap, snurre, Basselure! The song is ended."

But we who know, find it has but begun.

THE WATERS OF TIR-NA-OGE

"IMMATERIAL things," says Plato, "are the highest and greatest — and only show in thought and idea." Whether the thought comes in what we call waking or what we, for the want of knowledge, call dreaming is irrelevant. It is another and more subtle thinker who declares definitely that "only the idea is real." The thought alone has actual life and being. And there is yet another thinker who asks, "Can thought originate within us?" doubting the fact, proving its impossibility. "All life is but a dream," says he; "thought, a remembering from a far time passed by."

Those who read Homer might think this the truest of all sayings—those who read Shakespeare, Virgil, Ben Jonson, Empedocles, or Pythagoras; because the vividness of their style and diction is not so much creation as the impassioned recital of the one who has seen and remembers. Empedocles frankly acknowledges that he does remember. He alone out of all those who sway the world of thought can return with certainty and recall what he was.

There is an old Erse legend, that those who sing as Homer sang have drunk deep of the waters that flow through Tir-na-oge, "land of immortal youth." These cannot forget, for with that draught in their veins they are half in the land of dream while living in the land of fact.

They can lay hold of the minds of men and show them what they will, lull them to peace with visions of love and beauty, or rack them as with fire and sword.

> "With wasting fury, as a flood of flame
> Rolls o'er the ground—its waves."

When one speaks with effect like that, make sure he has drunk deep of the waters of Tir-na-oge, and is but remembering what he has seen. It is the idea put into deathless being.

And that man may die, but his words will live on, governing men's minds, holding and guiding; driving them to deeds of heroic valour, to splendid self-sacrifice or glorious bravery. Great souls who have this power know but little of the riches or splendours of this world they inhabit for the time. They have wooed Liban, daughter of the Wave. Theirs are loneliness and suffering—want, perhaps, and poverty; to be scorned and passed by, to travel on foot while vanity and insolence flaunt on soft cushions along the way. But little they mind

who have tasted the sweetness of heather ale and eaten of the Fairy banquet, spread under the green gloom of Tir-na-oge, among the Deathless Folk, while the birds sing in the blue.

Even to those who have it not, it is apparent that what sways the world is not of it, but belongs to the Immaterial, the Spiritual, and has no kinship with the mortal part at all. The souls of men recognize the abstract idea, and bow down to it. It is the idea alone that forces men to great acts, to mortification and endurance, to nobility of aim and end—the soul striving to subdue the body that it may enter into its inheritance, and remember.

Once, while I had no thought of such happening, I met one who remembered. I think she must have remembered from the beginning, as those do who have drunk often of the Waters of Dream. With most of us the soul-memory is brief and transient. We are suddenly about to see all when the spiritual impulse is gone. The curtain of oblivion drops and the soul-memory is darkened. It may be that the veil of flesh is too heavy to be held apart, unless it is worn thin by long suffering and tears, by many journeys through the cobwebbed gate which opens on the past.

But this one of whom I am about to speak remembered clearly, and spoke with certainty of

what she knew. While her feet yet pressed the ways of life, she looked back on what she had passed, and saw it all.

There had been a great storm the night before —wind and hail, lightning and thunderings. Across the river a line of ancient apple trees, that had been my delight in the spring and early summer, was marked by gaps, where the storm had laid one prostrate here and there. It was in the dusk of the twilight, and I had paused to look at the line of scarlet fire, drawn athwart the pearly blueness of the mists rising off the fields below the tender chrysoprase of the still summer sky. Little whirls of pale blue smoke were rising from the cottages below the bridge; long lights trembled down to the river-bed from the deep-laden barges in the lock. Men and women sat indolently enjoying the calm of the evening hour. The silence lay down there deep and still, as if civilization were not thundering by, twenty yards off, impelled to speed by the harnessed fires of heaven.

A woman came up with a long, smooth tread and halted beside me to look down on the level river, reflecting all the heights of the calm heavens. A tall woman, whose hair beneath her cotton sun-bonnet lay white as the rime of winter, whose high, delicate features showed clear as a cameo against

the dusk, almost luminous against the dark old buildings over the river. Her eyes shone darkly beneath black brows, thin and level; her mouth was firm but very sweet.

She balanced a bundle of apple-twigs on the grey stone parapet, and looked me in the face with a strange smile, the smile of one who knew me well. I saw her hands were stained with soil, her grey dress was fragrant of the earth. I remembered having seen her stooping over the weeding in the fields along the towpath.

"You are taking home a fire," I said, touching the apple-twigs.

She smiled down on me, serenely dignified, and I seemed to know that smile dear and familiar.

"When the nights close in early," she replied in a soft, far-off voice, "a fire is good to look at in the loneliness."

"The river also," I went on, though that I should have said such a thing to one whom I had never seen before did not occur to me as strange at that time. "The river recalls much to me."

Her eyes rested on the mirror-like level where the barges lay clustered together.

"I remember this place also," she said abstractedly, as one who recollects a vanished sorrow. "The tall-necked galleys lay among the grey reeds

along the shore. It was later dusk than this, with a new moon, faint and white, and we hid in the rushes, waiting, waiting. The ford was red, and only a few of us remained."

She pushed her bundle of apple-twigs a little on one side and looked down across the water.

"It is a long time past," she mused softly. "It was deeper then, and wider. The lush meadows are gone, the wind no longer whispers in the rushes at eve. They have hemmed it in and covered it. The days were long before the Romans came, and very sweet. All is clamour now, and confusion."

"The Roman galleys!" It flashed across me that I had heard of the Roman cohorts having come up this little waterway from the Thames, and taken the road to London. Then I was suddenly smitten with wonder that a woman who had been working in the fields should talk with the air and accent of a princess. She smiled at me again as she steadied the bundle of twigs.

"Cannot you remember," she asked. "But no! It is only when the soul is very strong that the barriers can be broken down. You were ever the weaker one. Some day, like me, you will remember what lies between Death and Time, but not yet; perhaps when we come together again, as we were at the Mill of Oran, on the day it ground the red

wheat that was your life and mine. Oh no! I will not tell, though I know what and who you are; and I know you well."

She laid a hand on mine, as it rested on the grey stone, and I, looking up at her in the twilight, was suddenly aware that we two were standing in a green wood, on a hillside overlooking the hidden sea. Below us lay a wide and endless plain, covered with a misty obscurity, violet and brown, merging away along the vague horizon into a dense purple blackness. Across the vague, intangible shadowiness stretched a wavering line of silver, that was now glitteringly bright and now darkly effulgent, as if it caught strange fires or was covered with strange vapours. That was a river. Overhead the sky was white, with a moon in it red as blood. There was no wind, no faintest stir in the hot night, and all the dense atmosphere was permeated by a mysterious pungent odour, repellent and horrible. Terror and horror in my soul recognized it as the smell of blood—blood that was flowing on the plain below in torrents. Faint as the light was, I could see her leaning against an oak bough that grew low from its trunk, her mantle of spotted green flung back, her face white and drawn, peering from her waving brown hair, her bright eyes devouring the darkness while we waited. Woe lay upon us, great

fear, bitter sorrow. Suddenly out of the misty darkness came a man in a tightly-fitting jacket worn over a white kilt, all bespattered with red. His feet were stained red in their laced coverings of deerskin. The gold torcs on neck and arm were dull and wet, his shield hung from a bleeding hand, and his downward pointing sword, short and heavy, dripped at the point. He flung himself at her feet, saying no word; across his body our eyes met.

"They go out on the flowing tide!"

Up through the dusk came the lapping of the flood-tide as it covered the yellow sand. The mists lifted and showed us the long waves lifting the fair-haired warriors as they had fallen, sword in hand, shield on arm, while the battle still roared on. I knew it all so well! The high, rugged headland, showing purple against the sky, the boundless ocean beyond, the curving circle of the little bay—Clontarf, with the plover crying over the vanquished dead; Clontarf on the night of sorrow after the day of partings. Dead! Locked foot to foot, hand to hand, with the fierce Northern invader. And the fight, the useless fight, raged on between the mountains and the flowing sea. I looked again, and we were on Brentford Bridge. She was lifting her bundle of apple-twigs.

"Tell me who you are? Who am I?"

She smiled sadly enough, and waved her hand towards the crowd below.

"Shadows all!"

The echo of her words followed on her footsteps as she vanished into the twilight.

"Shadows all!"

Shadows of the reality, vainly striving after the immaterial things, to which they do but belong. A motor flashed past me with a hooting cry. Another shadow, a phantasm less real than the unforgetting mind, that had but an instant since stood over the bay of Clontarf, and seen the long-haired Gael carried out on the flood of ocean, and heard the wailing cry that told of his death, who could not be bought or persuaded to do the thing that was wrong.

THE HEIGHT OF THE STARS

IT was dark along the shores of Coolmaine. Their outline heaved tremulously up, vaguely dusk and formless above the running wave. The woods hung low along by Cluan-an-uishga-geel, with never a breath to stir their multitudinous leaves. Somewhere between us and the wide swell of ocean a woman was singing in the Erse—a sweet, wailing melody with all the passion of despairing love in its haunting many-vowelled refrain.

"Es chi dee-ee-eeich, Mavourn, Ma-vourneen slawn!"

That was the cry of love, hopeless, longing, deserted, over what would return no more. The dip of the oars in the long green wave, as it billowed silently out from behind us in the dark and went swiftly onwards to shatter itself in foam on the rocks before, made a soft, continuous accompaniment to the lovely melancholy of the rich note. There would be no salve in this world, would soothe that hurt of which it sang.

There was no moon that night. Looking shoreward, the waves broke in phosphorescent gleamings; a flame of white fire ran round us as we went, and rippled tumultuously in our rear. A low grey mist lay over the sea, making it white in its greenness, but overhead shone all the planets, whirling in their spheres.

"I wonder," quoth one, "what is the height of the stars?" and another made answer, "I have read that the height of the stars is the stature of a man's soul."

Now I felt this was a hard saying; but wisdom awaits one in unexpected places, and confusion follows on untimely questioning. It was not the hour or the place, but I thought of the question and the answer, speculating on it within myself.

There was a distinguished philosopher who said, "Hitch your waggon to a star." I wonder why he said that? For he, of all men, must have known how little likelihood there was, once the stars swam into a man's horizon, of his cumbering himself with a waggon. He would no longer have need of it, for one may not travel to the realms of light and air save by the way of the spirit and on the feet of the spirit.

And on that way prince and beggar are alike, in that they are as man was in the beginning, when he stood among the beasts in Paradise—their friend,

perhaps, but certainly not taskmaster or tyrant. The waggon would be useless, unless the man foolishly attempted the way, drawing the waggon himself, unknowing that he who travels that route leaves behind him the burden of possessions as likely to hinder and impede his progress.

Those old mystics, who sought incessantly for the Elixir of Life and the Philosopher's Stone—the liquid that would make immortality certain in this world; the stone that would transmute all baser metals into pure gold—taught a profound and beautiful philosophy, great and wonderful truths, mostly culled from the wisdom and learning of the East.

Among other things, they set forth that a man, to rise, must do so on the ashes of himself; that to all spiritual heights the Magus must ascend through bodily and mental suffering. They must, as St. Francis did, fight with and conquer the body and subjugate the senses till they became fine and exquisite servants of the soul, opening doors into the unknown, teaching the wonders and might of the Creator.

Men have reached to the stars from the beginning of days, and always reached from the same height: the measure of the stature of their own souls; and a soul can only grow when all that prevents and dwarfs

it is taken up and cast forth. Diogenes reached the stars from his tub. Plato from his garden. St. Francis out of his narrow cell. But how much did each cast away from him before the heights were gained? To each his own bitterness, to each his own sweet. It is Circe who offers at first a cup running over with nectar. There are thorns about the goblet we drink. Its waters are dark and harsh on the lip as we set out for the light above. And perhaps nectar is sweeter among the stars. How shall we know, who have never tasted aught but bitterness here?

The ancient Magus who set out on the Hidden Way began with a forty days' fast and purification. Afterwards he lived as the very poorest—bread and fruit and water were his fare. He bathed winter and summer before dawn; regulated his hours of sleep, lest sloth should lay hold upon his soul in its absence from the body. He had to be scrupulously clean in person and clothing, to speak seldom, and to be in penitence. He was warned to choose his points of contact with the world, and to concentrate his energies within him on the thing he sought to achieve. Knowledge came without warning when he was prepared for it and he saw the way.

It was but a dream, that Elixir of Life, that wonderful stone. No mortal might ever find them,

because they are not in the scheme of things. They belong to a step higher, a time when we have reached the heights, and they are no longer necessary, or even desirable. Who will crave for the elixir when he understands life? And of what use the stone to one who knows that which gold cannot buy? I think perhaps many of those old mystics found what they sought, but found it other than they expected, and despised it.

The alchemist might quaff the elixir and find himself still what he was, for the rose and blue of Dawning cannot be held back, or the gold and white of Noon, hence it is well that Evening should fall in her garments of dusky grey; each has its charm and happiness, and the night comes when all sleep—to wake again afterwards.

Yet for all it was a dream it taught much, for it showed the way to the stars was open to that one who mastered himself. It stands to-day as when the old alchemist spoke it: "That if a man formulate his desire, an it be a high and praiseworthy desire, and a holy thing—an he work upon it immediately—it will come to pass; for to him who thinketh it, that thing is already begun."

When a man can restrain all impulse and has mastered himself, he can be no other man's servant. He who reaches to the stars will not be in subjection.

But after the victory over the mere body comes the strife with the passions; they must all be conquered in turn.

Mylittla is not for him—as wife or mistress she brings disaster; even to common clay, which has no aspirations, she is alternative delight and mournful mystery. The Magus avoids her. Even St. Chrysostom warns the aspirant. "For what," he asks, "is woman but an enemy to friendship, an unavoidable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable misfortune, a perpetual fountain of tears, a mischief of nature overlaid with varnish?"

"Amor febris species!" It must be, like all other maladies, overcome and passed. Hate and fear and hunger—they are for other and weaker spirits.

Determination is surely the means to all ends, call it by what name you will. As God Himself is eternal and unchangeable, so has He made this world and the creatures He has set in it with a yearning, never ceasing and imperishable, for the heights above. The trend of life is higher and higher still. It has no pause; even with apparent extinction the body itself goes on, the soul also.

In Southern India, on the great Nilgiri Plateau, from which rises a majestic and inaccessible

mountain called the Mukate Peak, there lives a strange, primitive race, the Todas, who have many mysterious traditions and fine thoughts. When a man there draws near to his end, and especially if he has lived a holy and ascetic life, they gather round to watch him pass. When the death-sweat beads his pallid face, when the breath comes quickly and strained, when the heart labours and the lips whiten, they say he is climbing the steep sides of the great Peak on his way to the stars.

And afterwards, when the breath ceases and the limbs are still and straight, they say he has departed into "the neighbouring country."

So will it be, I think, with many a one who is reaching to the stars. He will get there to find himself in a familiar neighbouring country. The boundary may be within touch any day—*here, now*—and we cannot see it till it is passed. When we pass over it is the moment surely of attainment, and that moment may be, as in the East, the moment following on the Great Renunciation.

The Buddhist makes the renunciation by leaving everything he possesses and going forth in the beggar's yellow garb to make his soul. It is possible in the East to do that, but under these Northern skies things are differently disposed. The Great Renunciation is made otherwise, and often we are

wearing the mendicant's robe and rattling the little wooden basin by the peepul trees of life, and no one is the wiser save the stars we reach to and the Master we feebly emulate. We are living in a fourth dimension, where we appear to be what we are not.

It is very true, I think, that a man finds in life only that which he brings to it, and sees only that which is in him. So that it might appear some are born with full vision of the stars and disregard them till the supreme moment arrives, when, like the King of Babylon, they stand at the parting of the ways, with the arrows of divination in their hands. It is a foregone conclusion that these will choose the difficult and upward path, and go with bleeding feet and grasping hands to higher things; bridging the mountain abysses with the cross; making their own miseries and sorrows and losses stepping-stones on to the neighbouring country.

I cannot tell, either, if it is good altogether to forget the ritual of love and hate as the old Mystics taught, for the atmosphere of the stars is very remote. But doubtless—for we have been shown—it is easiest to attain them over the scoria of our burnt-out passions; for only the purity and holiness of the soul remain unconsumed in the intensity of that splendour of light which is the full knowledge—the being as God and seeing the good and evil.

And so I would say, also, it is the broken hearts that fill the world with music. They sing as the girl sang in the dark, over the moonless sea along the shore of Coolmaine. Surely in her despair a woman reaches the stars sometimes at heights undreamt of by sacrifice, and that is the strangeness of love to woman.

For as Melusine is death to the spirit of the man, so Eros is the soul-creator, bringer of life to the woman; and that which the man renounces as the cup of Circe is often to her the goblet of sacrifice, sanctified with prayers and vigils and bitter tears. There are many ways to the stars, all of them lonely and steep, and all wet with bloody sweat. Surely at last they merge upon a plain in the neighbouring country where all distinctions are forgotten, and each finds the thing sought.

BORROWED DAYS AND STRAYED

I HAVE seen in the gloom and mirk of the great city a day come stealing up the wintry ways that was pure summer—summer at its sweetest, with a high blue sky, flecked with white, as if Hermes were driving a flock of lambs over the pathways of heaven—a day of radiant peace and sunshine, swept by a singing west wind, the wind of romance and mystery, suggesting a happiness impending and unfulfilled.

That sun and wind permeate the roaring tides of life with a sudden sense of youth. The sap quickens in the city trees, and moves the barren branches to beauty; they paint the grey buildings into the likeness of a dream. Here a touch of sheer violet in the long vistas, there a pearly haze which blurs harsh, forbidding outlines into mystic obscurity. The lions in the square, the grey-green of the icy fountains tossing into the bronze basin, the gigantic dome of St. Paul's, with its circling flight of silvery doves, are component parts of a loveliness thrust on the rejoicing eye with a curious haste. For the summer day that

comes in winter has but a brief time to stay, and it must needs make haste to show us what it can.

Hard faces relax, grim faces smile. There is a quickening of hand and heart and eye on this day. The world is unaccountably happy. It is a renewal of youth in the soul, as it is renewal of summer in the air.

In the Black North of Ireland they have a saying about that day. They call it a "borrowed day," and tell each other "Summer will be payin' back the winter the day she borrowed in her prime."

But in the wild West, where the green Atlantic surges up against the shore, the Erse folk have another way of speaking of that day. They think it a day that has been lost—"strayed." "This will be a day that lost itself, God bless it!" they say. "May it be a long eve, for it is good to the poor." It is good to the poor! Maybe it comes after long weeks of hail and cold, bitter frost and the "blight," that most cruel of all winds, dreaded of the poor, stealing noiselessly along the low boglands and over the bare hills, wrapping the world in an icy mantle of yellowish grey, bringing with it bitter misery to all. The roads are like lines of black glass, hard and impervious. The bog cotton-stalks, the loosestrife and ragweed, the faded heads of meadow-sweet, and the low bushes of whitethorn, grass and dead flower

and seed, are all alike erect and still in their garment of grey rime. The very airs are perished with the cold—cold almost beyond human endurance, so keen is its touch and breath.

Up to it comes the strayed day, and is hailed with blessings. The heartache is not so poignant, the pinch of hunger not so intolerable. It is as if Apollo wandered fluting through the land, thrilling all hearts to a passionate joy, the joy of youth and future, the happiness of things to come.

The beauty of hill and wind and sky may have been ours before; but in this day we take a new and peculiar delight in our possession, because something has been removed that once marred it. Aeolus thrusts all the winds into a leathern bag, binds it with a silver cord, and gives them to our keeping—all the winds save one, the wind of mystery and love, the singing, sweet west wind, that pipes over the world with songs of pearl and opal in high wild strains of joy, or deep, quiet notes, serene as ocean on the flow. The strayed day is flowing over with music; all the birds sing in it with a fervid passion; the wild bee wakes to murmur for an hour. They also are asking God to bless the day, amid bare boughs and leafless branches.

And I think there are strayed days in life too. We get blue summer days in harvest-time, in the

winter's frost and fog, when the senses are dulled and perception all but lost. The most terrible thing in age is the absence of future. There is no more—all is at an end. It will be like waiting for the eyes to close over the tired brain. Age is so weary! Too tired perhaps to go on—too weary to continue the unending retrospect. And into this winter-time comes suddenly a day from the June of life. Very likely it would not have considered it a theme for thankfulness had it come at its proper time, but now —what words can describe the bliss of reawakened youth? This comes to prove its immortality—that it lies in the soul ready to wake at a touch. Not all the months of life from April till October end could hold the sunshine of this belated summer day.

Age has been stooping under its burden, sad, morose, and silent; it has forgotten how the throstle sings, or what the wren says to its tiny mate. It is a long while back, since there was a whispering on the bough, or since it saw the purple bloom on the hills. Life has been so drear. All night!

> "So I have all the night
> Of my sweet youth thought;
> And alas! I wis
> Gone is my bliss."

Age has been thinking like that. Mourning in his soul, saying with Dante, over the sombre mists of

hell, "Bruna, bruna, sotto l'ombra perpetua." It will be so for ever. If one offered length of days to Age at that time of thinking, it would be to hear an answer such as Cormac, the son of Selbach, gave the angel.

Cormac had lost love and youth and wealth, and become an anchorite, who dwelt with fasting and mortification in the oak wood of Darragh, and there he was captured and bound by the Pagan hordes under Turgesius. Three times did an angel free him from his bonds, and three times did Cormac consent to his death with gladness. "What?" he cried; "shall I return to the dark of life, with the glory of Heaven before me?" And so he died. If the glory were his in the end, who can tell? It is certain he had somehow shut out the strayed day; for we all think like that till it dawns, and sets our blood dancing as it did in childhood.

When Immortal Youth springs forth in us the gloom and misery, the chill and loneliness of our winter-time is wiped out. We remember it no more. It is June in our hearts for one day, and in it we live a thousand days gone past and all their gladness. What if it be December for the rest of the world! They too have their strayed and borrowed days, and can rejoice also when their turn comes.

The preacher will tell you, "This is compensation."

But it is not that. It is conviction—proof absolute of the immortality that is in us. The feet of middle age do not tingle to dance on the pavement with the tattered gutter child. It does not go lilting joyously along the ways, or restrain with difficulty the laughter and jest that bubble to the lips. No! but on the strayed day it feels all these things, for it is in the June of its life again, and realizes it is perpetually young, immortally glad.

And the heart of Age is cold, but on this day it overflows with love for humanity as it did in the time when great love was its own portion, the portion we share with others, the tribute to Dis, paid in our hours of joy, lest the immortals see it and be envious.

"To the stones be it said" the heart is always young. We may, for all we know, be younger when we come to the gates of the Valley of Transition than when we were ferried over from Oblivion.

Wasted perhaps by scorn and doubt and misery, overlaid by the shadow of an obscure fate, and carrying the torch of extinguished passion; but we may have shaken off the weight of unguessed ages behind us in the living of these borrowed days.

We may pay for the hours of charm with years of wretchedness and isolation. But what of that? It

is enough surely to remember the music and warmth and glory of that day, when the blood leaped tumultuously through our sluggish veins, and tinged the cheek and throbbed in the heart once more. Only for the length of a day! To sing and laugh from sun to sun, to feel again the irresponsible delight of life's springtime. It may seem too high a price, but it is not. Perhaps it depends on ourselves that day if the price be too high or no price at all. When we have broken the callous bonds that held us and feel we are akin to all the suffering in the world, to all the happiness and joy; when we recognize with thankfulness our fellowship with the gutter child, dancing grimly on the wet pavement, the price is small—very small. For are we paying it entirely alone?

The day is yours, but the blight is in the souls of others; the keen frost chills the springs of being for multitudes. Take of your sunshine—the sunshine that is like palpable gold, and can be gathered in the hands—and bestow it on the others.

You may never have another Borrowed Day while you live. But think it the one gold piece in your purse, and offer it just the same, and you will see a miracle. It is as if you offered charity to a beggar in the highway, who, taking your solitary coin, led you suddenly to the King's treasury, and, thrusting

precious jewels upon you, said: "Take these, for they are yours." You will take them and go forth to hear the new song in the wind, see the new blueness of heaven. To reap a harvest, sown in the Borrowed Day.

THE SUNLIGHT OF THE SEA

I REMEMBER a night in the Persian Gulf—moonless, deep in its violet blackness as a purple passion-flower, with no stars in the dim hyacinthine vault above, and a sea black as glass, smooth, level, unbroken, and unmoved. No whisper from wind or tide stirred the tense silence of the hour; the ship swung on the tideway languid and listlessly, as if feeling the weariness of the heat and the burden of the silence. Now on this side she glided over an abysm of darkness, now on the other showed the thousand lights of Bussora, city of sin and strange things. Suddenly, on the lower deck, a boy began to sing to his lute, in a soft, girlish contralto, and his song was of a lover, betrayed and deserted, who, wandering beside the sea, finds on its sands a piece of yellow amber, and remembers it was once a tear, shed by his love on a long-past day when he was the faithless one, even as she in the present was faithless to him.

I leaned over into the soft velvety blackness and listened with that curious vague sensation which

haunts us all at times of having once heard the song and story before. But when and where, for that moment, I could not remember. The voice ceased with a dull twang from the little lute, and a balmy coolness blew across the burning decks, soft with the breath of rain-drenched rose-blooms from far-off gardens on the desert edge.

I called into the dark, "Boy, sing again that song of the amber tear."

Back came the answer from the lower deck, softly clear—

"Lady, I can sing no more. The Samoor blows —my lute is unstrung."

Then I remembered that while the south wind blows no lute or violin can be tuned, because that balmy wind renders the strings so soft, and there is no song while it lasts; for what minstrel in the East, be he Hindu or Persian, will sing without the tinkling accompaniment of his little lute?

Still the song haunted me, the low sobbing refrain, the passionate regret, and still I wondered where I had once listened to it before.

The ship swung round again in the Samoor, and the sea was rippled into long lines of pale green fire, and far as the eye could see lay a galaxy of floating stars, shedding moonlike radiance through the lucid waters. All the darkness had gone, the night was

now outlined in moony sheen. It was as if the ship had slipped her anchorage, and slid, like a towering bulk of misty cloud, into a firmament fallen on the sea.

Never had I seen so strange a sight, yet instantly it brought to me the fugitive remembrance after which I was striving so vainly. I remembered in a flash the story of the amber tear. It was in my childhood, by the stormy sea of Moyle, late in the gloaming of midsummer eve, while the Bel fires were still blazing on every little hillock and tall crag. And on the shore with old Brigid I found at my feet a piece of yellow amber shaped like a tear.

"An' that will be a tear dropped by Lir's daughter while the charm was on her that held her over wild Moyle," said Brigid. "Ah, now! 'tis a long while she wept before she heard the church bells ring on Eire."

I stood, with the dark yellow amber in my palm and the sound of the restless waters in my ears, while old Brigid sat on a flat rock and related that sad history, which is the chief of the three Sorrows of Story-telling.

"But, Brigid," I remonstrated, "how can one weep tears like this? It is like the sun when it comes over the sea in the morning; it is warm and smooth, and smells so sweet!"

"An' why not, Aroon?" answered Brigid. "Wasn't it the golden youth of her—her beauty an' her longing an' her love? Her tears had a right to be all that; for didn't she weep herself into them? An' they do be sayin', Machree, that they who find her tears will be sheddin' many themselves, but will ever have the power to make others forget them."

"Come home now," she added, "for the Little Good People do be goin' by there, an' 'tisn't good for the likes of you to be in their way this night."

She pointed out to sea, and I saw every sullen wave-crest tipped with faint white light. To her it was the Fairy Court travelling from Tory Island to the mainland. Knowledge would have told her in vain it was but floating shoals of almost impalpable sea-creatures driven before some far-off storm-wind—the first thoughts of Creation, mysteriously aflame without fire or heat. So when I looked over the ship's side into the sun-kissed waters of the tropics, I went back to that childish day and remembered old Conal the Weaver piercing my amber tear and stringing it on a length of scarlet thread that I might wear it as a talisman and pray, like the Pagan Princess, who waited through all the long centuries with her brothers, that she might save their souls and her own by her long and terrible self-sacrifice.

"See now," said Conal, as he put it round my

neck, "the only thing we have when it comes to the last is what we have done for others. Mind ye now, ma creveen cno."

So it was with the daughter of Lir, so it is with us all when we give ourselves for others; our souls weep tears of amber, imperishable and fragrant, for in them is the essence of our youth, our gladness, our joy. Sorrow comes in the midst of sunshine and lays a spell on us, transforming us into wild swans, so that we leave the dull earth and soar heavenwards, seeking consolation in the grey clouds. Strange it is that all our sorrows come through those we love; and love, while it charms us out of ourselves, gives wings, while desire ties our feet and kills the soul eternally.

We must all suffer, because through all the ages the soul thirsts for immortality, and knows it can be gained only in one way—by laying life down for love's sake. We must not say, "What is this one to me?" for though we may not know that one at all, yet to-morrow it may be that one is the other, whom we must ransom from death, or who will ransom us.

The meaning of life is hidden till that time comes that we soar high above the ocean of human misery, weeping over it as it ebbs and flows for ever between life and death. And happy they whose tears are found long ages after on the shore of time, and are strung on a scarlet thread, to lie on the pure heart of

a child, bringing such thoughts as may come through the pink lips of the ocean shell, where the sea murmurs, ever complainingly to the ear. Nor may one say, "What matters it where we go? One is forgotten in Eternity." There is no Eternity other than this in which we are. It is as if a child made a circle with his finger in the sea, and said, "This is Time; I live in it; nothing outside concerns me."

It is not given to every eye to see outside that invisible line drawn by man's finger on the soundless waves of being; nor to every ear to hear the deathless song through which the amber tears fall into the deep. Yet the one who sees and hearkens is worth all the unheeding thousands who cannot; for to that one is revealed the hidden truth, the reason for the earthly sojourn, the meaning of the struggle, the cessation of longing, the perfection through pain.

As the lover in the Persian song remembered a time when he, the unfaithful one, sowed the seeds of unfaith, so whoso finds the amber tear may recall the loveliness of sacrifice. All beauty, all comfort, must come through suffering. How can we understand what we know not? And only the initiate can enter in. This life is like a mighty wheel between the life that was and the life to be. It is the Wheel of God on which we are thrown, to circle giddily in many revolutions through the abyss of space, till we

have forgotten the baseness of our origin in our high destiny. The clay is thrown back and back again, cast into varying shapes, into many forms, till at last it stands complete, a thing of beauty, perfect and finished, to rejoice high heaven.

The Wheel of God is suffering. None may be marred by His awful hand. But it may be so that we mar ourselves and cling to what we are.

And it always so happens that to those specially chosen for tears comes the love of laughter, craving for joy. The soul that suffers most is that soul formed in exquisite proportions for bliss. It is the gladness, the happiness, the love that is wept into amber tears, so that they reflect sunshine through the dark seas into which they fall, and lighten all the gulfs of human woe.

What is sympathy but an amber drop, golden and translucent, cast on a scarlet thread about the neck of Misery?

And it is better to weep such tears, even under goad and whip, than to be but a crackling of thorns, consumed in idleness and remembered no more after. In being solely to ourselves we lose the right to be. The only life, the only happiness, our sole claim to immortality, is what we do for others. Our joys, our hopes, our smiles, live after we are gone, like the tears of Lir's spellbound daughter. The sunlight of life,

beautiful, golden, smooth, and sweet-smelling, glowing centuries after we have passed on, with the heart's love and consolation we gave out of our own bitter agony, and happily found and treasured as a holy thing to ward off the power of evil.

SILHOUETTES

IT was very silent in the House of Tears. Outside the multisonous cryings of the tempest; but within, the vast quiet of unbroken ages, the gloom and obscurity of height and depth untenanted, darkness brooding over marble and carving, over wide hall and oaken stair. Invisible, the presences that haunted the great house passed noiselessly up and down, in and out of the panelled rooms, and out upon the gallery where once the musicianers sang, while a king feasted with the wits and beauties of a bygone age.

Here and there in the fleeting moonbeams a painted face, a figure tricked in all the finery of the past, gazed out for an instant and vanished into the gloom again, as if borrowing for one moment the long-perished life wherewith to look out again curiously on an age that had forgotten it.

The moon, white and full, looked straightly in at the tall old windows, throwing a complex mass of dancing shadow on the polished floor. Long I watched them to and fro on the glassy surface.

Presently my eye was caught by other shadows on the window glass—fine, ethereal, exquisite,—swaying, dancing, weaving strange patterns on the vacant glass, now tossing to the cornice, now wavering gracefully to the stone ledges, filling me with a dreamy delight in their mysterious loveliness,—thin as lace, intricate, marvellous in their finish and proportion. Twigs already budding to the distant spring, branches, boughs, and trunk stood out in velvety blackness on a clear white brightness of moonlight in the storm: a whole gale roared and rang through the melancholy concourse of ancient trees that gathered in sad communion round the old house. What mystery of loveliness was this among them, outlined on the dim glass of the old windows!

Full of the charm and delight with which the swaying shadows had filled me, my eyes travelled out and above the clamorous tree-tops to the sky, swept by the roaring wind to a hyacinthine blueness, where the moon swam blazoned in argent, attended by one great golden star. On the very lowermost edge of the horizon the gale had banked up the clouds in a mountainous pile—snowy white and cold. Below it the river ran, a gleaming thread of obscurely-shining light, on a dim violet plain, whose boundaries ran vague and imporous, towards an outline of luminous white,—an outline that

might have been the confines of Elysium, bordering on the dim plains of Hell. In the misty moonlight, and with the winds, that plain seemed covered with throngs of crowding ghosts, hastening to taste for an instant the semblance of vanished life.

The night brings metamorphosis; it makes all things strange and unfamiliar; it is a potent magician —a great painter holding a palette charged with but few dim, fugitive colours—doubt, mystery, uncertainty—black, purple, white; with these he makes glamour. I sought in it for the tree that cast such beautiful reflection on the window-panes, thinking how lovely the substance would be that threw such shadow.

It was very old—old and bowed and gnarled, twisted past all belief, as if it had sunk contorted beneath the weight of untold years. It made an impression of desolate misery on me, as if I had come suddenly in the wind and storm upon some bent old woman, shuddering away from her loneliness and age, deserted, hideous, forgotten. Yet the shadow on the glass was graceful, happy, young, dancing with the delight of all young things in the rushing wind, weaving patterns of happiness, exquisite thoughts, as if moving to gay melodies. A strange thing that!—and one that moved to strange thoughts. Presently I thought that the moon saw that tree as it

was truly, before two hundred years of sunshine, of storms and rains and snows, had hidden its semblance from mortal sight. The form cast on the blank glass was the reality, stripped of outward excrescences and disfiguring crookedness,—the soul of the tree in its beauty. I could not see it; I was too near the brown earth, too blinded by its limitations; but the moon, far above all the mists and glamour, saw it truly and set it forth on the mirror-like glass, against the night and storm.

So it came to me, as I looked, that as it was with the white acacia so it might be with us also. How many of us who are ungainly and crooked to the mortal eye would throw, in the moonlight of clear-seeing, a shadow that was all beauty and youth? The beauty and youngness of immortality, some there are on whose soul-casement the shadow falls perceptible even to the dullest, set out in lines of light against the dark. With others it is merely a glimpse—again, we guess at its presence, but never see it at all. And I think it may be that the shadow is the reality, and the reality only shadow: the shadow that melts and decays, and flies out on the wind of Eternity from the crucible of the great alchemist Death.

And it may be also that those who present themselves to us in forms of strength and harmonious

proportion, pleasing to eye and mind, may cast a shadow crookedly enough in the moonlight of perspective; things evil in their ugliness, undiscovered till night and storm make metamorphosis of them. Surely beauty shown like that is the expression of God, and ugliness that of Evil, because both are spiritual in their quality, and convincing from within. It is the hidden reality that impresses itself on the world that counts in the end, as having been lovely and pleasant, or revolting hideousness. Drab mediocrity is too insignificant for damnation, too commonplace for the realization of eternal bliss.

There came to my mind, as I stood watching, the remembrance of a story told me by the Brown People on a sea-girt islet in the far Pacific—the story of a lover hidden by enchantment from the woman who sought him, as Psyche sought Eros; amid pain and travail of soul and body. How, when at last she found him, he was changed into the likeness of an old man newly dead, propped against a peepul tree, and she weeping in despair, made of her tears a pool on the grass, and, looking therein, saw the face of her lover, and, bestowing on the old dead man the three kisses of faith and life and love, brought him to her arms in all the freshness and beauty of his youth.

The hidden reality invisible to the eyes was mirrored in the glass of her sorrow, as the outline of

the tree was cast upon the glass. Only the substance of the immortal part showed in the reflection. The gods showed themselves to men by a light which shone visibly from them, setting them forth in the likeness of humanity, made as men, only more beautiful, more stately, perfect. So in the light of truth we may look past the twistings of infirmity and age, sorrow and sickness, and see the loveliness, the strength and youth, that lie hidden away. "Aurum in comis et in tunicis, ibi inflexum hic intextum" (The golden fibre shows in every hair, the golden thread in every tunic).

But it seems to me that it must be pointed out to us by "the Lord of terrible aspect"—mighty, unconquerable Love, and through tears. He stands by us, as he did by the Florentine, weeping, till through his tears we see, as the moon sees, clearly, with no mists between. Lord of Life and Death, as he is, we must needs do his bidding, and see what he wills, otherwise he is our Medusa, and we are frozen into stone, losing all semblance to humanity, petrified into our own image.

It may well be that the moment of clear seeing is put off till the wind from beyond the grave tosses the branches high, and throws the shadow on the darkling glass. We may keep no white nights, for the thinking of long thoughts, that go out beyond

life, to the life to come. And we may, like the Roman Emperor, "live as on a mountain," remote, with the things that most concern us.

And happy they who see past the substance to the reality that is in the shadow, and to whom come the storm and darkness, and the presence of the dead with the perception that goes past all pretensions and disguise, to the living, actual truth, which can recognize the substance in the shadow and the shadow in substance.

THE GOLDEN RULE

BY what rule shall we regulate life so that we may attain to a perfect knowledge of ourselves? Science can tell us little. It stands on the outer edge of a hidden world all belonging to us, but which we cannot claim, for the reason that we are so ignorant of it. Now and again the gloom which covers it lifts a little, and we learn breathlessly some truly astounding fact concerning ourselves and our destiny. But so far no traveller has returned from the far bourne to assure us certainly what we have been, what we are, and to what we go on. It was in the dusk of a summer evening, and I walked with Elinor in the old rose-garden. The twilight had come very close. I had seen it creeping slowly off the inner garden across the wall, drifting in pearly wreaths over the close-shaven lawn, under the drooping branches of walnut, beech, and hazel.

A low-growing maiden's-blush had surrounded itself with a cloud of sweet heady perfume, its pinkish-white blossoms showing vaguely through the fragrant gloom. From under it, as we passed by,

came a halting little white form and sat on the box-bordered walk before us.

"That is the poor crippled white cat," exclaimed Elinor; "I must speak to her." She knelt down on the path and stroked the cat gently, murmuring after her sweet, compassionate fashion the while.

The cat had lost its right front leg. It lifted the remaining paw and patted its mistress softly on the cheek three times, then crept away under the rose again. Elinor remained on the path, gazing up at me in surprise.

"Oh!" she gasped, "I feel as if she had reproved me for pitying her."

"Perhaps she did," I ventured; "how can we tell? She may understand why she was caught in the trap and maimed so horribly."

"Perhaps," repeated Elinor, helplessly; "but I do not know." She rose, and we resumed our walk in silence that lasted one round of the old-fashioned garden.

"Murgien," began Elinor, abruptly, "I always feel with that poor little thing that she is under a spell, and she comes to me, looking up with human eyes out of her pretty animal head, and begs me to remember the word that will set her free. 'Alas! Snowy,' I say, 'I do not know it;' and we sorrow together for a moment before she creeps away again to hide. Do

not smile at me. I think I see in her eyes the agony of a soul in durance."

I went homewards through the summer dusk, thinking over this, along with other things, and wondered to myself at the little we know, what we are, where we are, what surrounds us, whither we are bound.

It was hot and breathless in the dark hours; there was no moon, and a storm was working up in the motionless atmosphere. Presently, with one clattering snap, the tension broke and the rain came down, a soft pattering of thousands of fairy feet on the thirsty leaves and grass. I sat at my open window rejoicing as if I were some green thing. The keen sweet odour of wet earth, of drinking grass and leaf and flower, filled me with a passion of delight. The fragrance of elder-blossom, of rose, and privet spires, of drenched mignonette and carnations, rushed up to me in joyous gusts, as if it were the happiness of the growing things in which I had my part; for I understood it all.

My friend Fiontuin, the Master of Dreams, who cannot but show the truth, touched me in the sweet warm gloom, and showed me a vision of Being, beginning in the kindly brown earth—Hertha, mother of all living, to whom we all return, on whose bosom the grass grows and the flowers bloom, sinless and

joyful, swinging in sun and wind. To love a thing perfectly is the result of perfect knowledge. The understanding of a thing can only be gained by being. Might it not be that our love of flower and leaf and tree, of the green grass and the flowing stream, is because the life within us has come through and permeated them all?

The disciples of evolution tell us we cannot be immortal, that there is no soul in us, because we have risen by slow and painful stages from one degree to another, till we have arrived at our present stage. And what if we have? What if the All-Wise Master has, with infinite pains and carefulness, brought us stage by stage up the ascending planes? Is that to say there are no more to climb? If the Life has pulsed joyfully in leaf and bloom, in this or that creature on the plane below, is there not the more reason to think that hidden away on the plane above are other and more beautiful stages of being? I have seen in the eyes of the maimed white cat just such a look as one might see in crippled humanity. Who is to tell us when the soul comes? or what example our dumb dependents are taking from ourselves, so much farther on in the journey? I think the Great Intention is beauty. Everything in creation is formed with such beauty, such grace and perfection, that one must needs see that. But sometimes the Intention is

marred and broken—never by suffering or sorrow: but by what is called pleasure—what is certainly selfishness and sin. It must be sin to be ugly, for no good thing is made other than beautiful.

The exertion of will is surely the greatest factor in life, and we can will ourselves to beauty by the performance of beautiful things—compassion, pity, tenderness, charity—not in the giving of alms, but in love and compassion for our kind. All these make beauty; they can show through all disguise as the expression of God-Love. And love is beauty.

So that in not living beautifully we are hindering ourselves in the ascent, hampering our progress, making stumbling-blocks of ourselves for others.

The East teaches that those who think unkindly, who speak evilly of others, who are guilty of gross pleasures, and who subserve their wills to the desires of vanity for the sake of advancement in this world, will be born into crooked and ugly bodies in their next existence. The woman who betrays her friend, the man who sells his opinions, will come again, in the likeness of their thoughts, deformed. They make themselves.

In the East I have heard a woman say, "Oh! I cannot do that; I would be born next time a hunchback."

That may not be true. On the other hand, he

would be bold who would say that it could not be so,—for even in this life we make ourselves. The miser, the evil-speaker, the drunkard and glutton, and those who deny the claims of humanity; those who ignore the poor, the suffering, the outcast;—see how they have made themselves! Furtive eyes, hard mouths, unlovely jaws, forbidding countenances. They have no love, so no love is theirs. The false, the wholly mean, the unreal, have no beauty; theirs is the hard and stony afterwards, for even here we have a choice of ways. We can make ourselves as we will, beautiful or otherwise.

Paracelsus says that the young of lions are born dead and must be waked by their parent's roaring. So one might think that the evil we have in us is dormant till we come in contact with the world, and it is waked by the roaring of our passions. It wakes and sleeps and wakes again. Yet men have fought with lions and conquered because of their own intuitive knowledge of the beast—the thing they were. It is as if the brute speaks to the human across a hidden and narrow gulf, of which there is no knowledge how it was crossed, or if there is a way back. Yet, looking down on it from where we are, we are suddenly assured of the other and higher stages to which we are climbing through great dole and affliction.

We grasp back at the knowledge we possess, secure in its truth; with it we can realize also the beauty beyond, higher and nobler than we can yet comprehend. The Master shows the way; the rule is brief and unmistakable—only over our dead selves can we attain to higher things—unknown and past all human thought and expression.

Zoroaster had a rule which taught him who would control "The Operations of Life." It taught purity of mind and body; that to be immaculately pure in mind and body was to attain to perfection of Spirit; and the Spirit which knows all things is beautiful, because *is* is all things. He might not in his probation satisfy his hunger or thirst, but was taught to share all he had with the poor and suffering. He might not refuse the cry of any, or wear soiled garments, or look upon a gross thing, or possess money more than what would purchase for his immediate needs. He was not allowed to talk much —the will grows best in silence, in hunger, penitence, suffering, he learned his lesson. He abjured idleness and forgetfulness as being the enemies of Will, and the Will is Spirit and the Spirit Power, and Power meant the stage above humanity, where hunger and thirst and cold would no longer need fighting or the Passions to be overcome.

He was permitted none of what we call the

pleasures of this world because they hindered his progress. "Extreme love causes loathing," said the Rule. "Vanity leads to abasement; uncharity and much speaking to loss of all power."

And he was taught to consider himself as the dog, as the horse, as all and every creature might be—so had he to look upon himself and suffer with their wants. Thus gradually the Flame of Life soars upward to the blue and loses itself beyond, where we may not see.

But of this there can be no doubt: that it is only by the Golden Rule man may so regulate his steps that they lead ever upwards in the scale of Being. And the Rule may be summed up in one word—Love. Love is beauty, and beauty is perfection. We may gain them both, surely, by wiping out the ugliness we encounter.

It may be, then, that there we would find the memory of suffering would be consumed in the splendour of intense loveliness—wearing the guise of a physical and intellectual perfection, beyond our knowledge now, but to be revealed.

And what if we sorrow greatly and are torn and bleeding and broken on the bosom of Mother Earth?

"Ferrum, flamma, ferae, fluvium, saevumque venenum,
Tot tamen has mortes una corona manet."

THE HOUR OF SILENCE

THERE is a day in Life to which we come through chaos. We have walked with the Pit of Fire on the left hand, and on the right the Deep Waters. We have come through fire and storm and flood, and find ourselves at the foot of a mighty mountain aspiring through the clouds. That day is the Day of Bitterness, and in it is the hour of silence, when all the clamour, the brazen outcry, and the weeping ceases. There is no help in heaven or earth—no looking back on the pleasant valleys, the grassy flower-clad meadowlands, the song and happiness and laughter. The love with which our hearts brimmed over for all mankind because of the love that was ours, the fervid, passionate joy in being. We cannot look beyond the fire and tempest; it is as if that time had never been, as if we had always dwelt, desolate and alone, in the still mists at the foot of the great barrier, shutting out all hope, all expectation, all desire. There is no life in the soul that day—Being has come to a standstill. It hangs suspended, swooning, after the bitterness of the

ordeal. It has no present, no future, no past. It is like a pool of water in the burnt-out crater of some volcano, reflecting nothing but blank mists.

That is the waiting-time; in it we pass all earthly things and can no longer be touched by suffering such as we have known—by pain or loss or hope. We are past it all, reflecting nothing.

The time will be like winter—grey, with rolling fog that shuts us off into a grey silence. There is a folding of the hands, not in resignation but in impotence. The head is bowed; there is a sense of finality, of void and emptiness. All things have been proven, and all have failed us. The storm and clamour are over; there is no more. All is finished—done: It is the end.

But into the blank silence comes a still small voice, unheard amid the roar and fury: "Be still, and know!" And so the soul is still and learns its lesson of power; learns that the past was but a portion of its appointed ordeal and task—that in it lay no gain, no strength, but only weakness and failure.

The mists roll away and show us the aspiring path, not so impossible or terrible as it seemed. There is, as it were, a veil rent from before the eyes. We see what had been hidden before clearly and distinctly. Things appear as they are, not as we had made them be. We have acquired knowledge

in the silence, knowledge that could never have been ours had the way not led through the Waters of Affliction and the Fire. We are conscious of a change: we will remember hereafter to judge no man, and least of all ourselves, for we have now the measure of the wind and the weight of fire: the essence of those things that are only gained through suffering, the height and depth of which cannot be expressed by mortal speech—the heritage of those who follow by the Way of Tears.

In that hour we can look back again once more on life and see it, like a river, rising in the hills, splashing and foaming, wasting itself in whirling eddies and furious rushes aside, this way and that; racing over the level, falling hurriedly down the steep places, gleaming, laughing in the sun—all prettiness, noise, and bubbles, useless, idle, shallow. Then, lower down, widening in its bounds and taking on, little by little, the burdens of the peasant folk who live along its banks: carrying the sweet-scented crops to market in the long, flat-bottomed barges; kissing the children's feet at its edge, still laughing, leaping, curling when it can, till it is at last confined in great gates and bound in servitude—a bearer of burdens, black, polluted, and changed, bearing on its broad bosom the wealth of nations, wearily urging to the sea. Calling for it, hungering for it, yet hindered

and kept back; yet the sea calls to it night and day, stealing up among the tall ships and deep-laden barges, the white ocean steamers, and the ships of war.

"Come! Come!" sings the sea, "and be at rest with me. Be clean and young again;" and the river beats against its bars and swirls around its high bridge piles, hastening to that cry.

It widens and spreads into still water. It is strong now, and there is no hurry, no idle foamings, but the steady, irresistible swiftness of the current ever gliding on, grimy, black, and weary, till at last it meets the kiss of the wide sea and mingles with the tides of ocean.

So it is with us while we stand before the mountain of Despair. On the other side lies the sea, smiling, dimpling, whispering in the sun. It calls, and we gather up our new strength—the strength born of silence and isolation—and climb to the heights, to look upon its face.

All the noise and clamour had brought nothing. It was meaningless; "sound and fury, signifying nothing." Only the bitter water could have washed away the scales from our eyes, and only the silence could teach us power.

We look upwards and see the beauty of the heights above, and lo! the mountains pass into our

possession. We can live on them now, who had but so short a space since been unable to breathe in so fine an atmosphere.

True, the joys and contentments of life as we have known it can no more be ours. The exquisite agony through which we have come has changed our form. The old garments no longer fit. We have outgrown them. So the soul looks on the thing she suffered for and is lost in wonder. "Did I love that gross thing?" she cries. "Can I have worshipped an image of clay?"

But she had worshipped, and her discovery of the baseness of the idol has cost her the pangs of hell.

The price for clear vision must be paid, and it is always the same, it makes us anew, and removes us from the plane on which we learnt the bitter lesson to another where we see all things different.

The spiritual nature is slow to wake; only the touch of fire can stir it into being, and it has many metamorphoses, many stages of evolution. The Pagan Hero who descended into the land of the Dead and sacrificed to the Shades returned not himself, but another. After Dante had seen the Lady of his Love in the fields of asphodel and amaranth he was not the same. We *cannot* be the same after descending into the deeps. We are changed and new. I think most of us are like Tam

Lin, in the old Celtic ballad. We are, like him, held under a spell we cannot break save by knowledge alone.

Under the compelling hand he became a snake, a dragon, a wolf, a tiger, and at last a bar of red-hot iron. The molten bar was dropped into the dark waters of the holy well, and Tam Lin emerged in his true self, rid of all the loathly spell which made him love his evil enchantress and slight the real woman who dared the powers of Faery for his sake.

So with us; we come through many dire metamorphisms till at length we are ourselves, stripped of all shams and pretence and falsehood, at the foot of our mountain of despair—alone in the silence—to climb to the summit in our new being, powerful and strong.

When the silence ends we have learnt so much. Now there is courage to look on the past and see things as they were. We recognize the worthlessness of the thing for which we bled. See how utterly out of all proportion to its value were our pangs and agonies! It is as if one paid a king's ransom for a handful of glass beads taken from the neck of a courtesan. We know, seeing them with open eyes, that they are not precious. But remember that in the light of the day that is gone we thought them worth the price of a soul. They would go ill now

with harp and crown—cheap, common things, only fit for the dust and clay, the overturned wine-cup and the draggled board.

The suffering we have endured for their sake was terrible while it lasted. But it was ordained for us that we should enter into our kingdom by that way, and better that way than never at all. Even if the kingdom has been ravaged by fire it is the cleansing fire, such as sweeps over the dry and barren bush. Behind it lie the scorched and blackened acres, over which the heart weeps and mourns bitterly. But the clouds come after the flame with the slow-dropping rains; and, lo! a new beauty beside which the old beauty was as nothing.

So when the command comes and we are bidden to "Be still!" let the soul, fainting under its torture, take courage and learn to be strong. It is not the end—only the beginning, and the ocean of love lies on the other side of the mountain where we wait in the Hour of Silence.

HELL-SHOON

I REMEMBER as if it were but yesterday an afternoon in my childhood when I sat astride the old garden wall at my home, holding a basket into which Terence, the gardener—wise old Terence of the tuneful voice—had been dropping the yellow-red fruit from the espaliered trees against the warm bricks. We were watching a procession pace slowly, mournfully along the wide high road towards the little church on the hill.

It was a day in late October, a warm, still, golden day. Through the thick yellow sunlight the gossamers floated slowly on their mysterious voyages—no-whither. The thorns across the road had clutched with a hundred hands at the laden wains as they passed, and seemed as if they were embracing streels of golden light amidst their scarlet leaves and crimsoning haws. The thistledowns stood erect like globes of silvery fire, without the loss of one single spear of airy radiance. The late honeysuckle stretched over a flame of blazing dog-wood puffing vague fragrance on the waiting time—even the old wall

was decked with loveliness, and out of every clump of emerald moss stood up a splendid array of tiny vermilion cups, each with its drop of silvery dew.

Beautiful, motionless, heavy with content, was the day; blue and misty, laden with infinite peace, languid with the thankfulness of bounteous harvest. Nature lay smiling half-asleep and happy—and through the stillness slowly crept this doleful and quiet train of the unmourned dead.

For this funeral was unlike any I had ever seen pass that way. There was no low, bitter keening; no clapping of hands in grief; no tears or cries or prayers. After the shabby old hearse walked a man and a boy; after them the white-haired priest, then the doctor's gig—and that was all.

Terence shook his white head and crossed himself fervently.

"Himself will be leavin' a red trail acrost the Bridge o' Dread this night," he said solemnly. "May God pity him that had pity for none! 'Tis a poor naked soul his will be!"

"But," cried I, "he is dead—he needs no clothes now."

"God bless your innocence, then!" responded Terence, compassionately. "Sure, 'tis after death we have most need to be clothed. A cloak to cover the limbs, an' shoes to the feet, an' a bit in the hand to

throw the Hound o' Hell. An' 'twill go but ill wi' this man, agra, for he ne'er gave bit, or sup, or coat, or shoes to e'er a wan but himself in all his days. So, naked as he came, to judgment he must go. God pity him!"

I remember the vivid instantaneous picture that flashed before me then of a cowering and naked soul standing before the gentle, white-clad figure that was God to me, shivering away from the sweet, piercing eyes of Him who gave all, overcome with shame and futile repentance for the self-centred life that had no thought for any save its own; and I saw it again, miserable, unclothed, unblessed, setting out for the Bridge of Dread, to make the last journey alone.

I found something of the same sort, many a year after, in an old ballad, sung by another nation like my own—

"This is a night, this is a night; every night and alle.
Fire and fleete and candle-light, and Christ receive thy saul.
When thou from hence away art paste, every night and alle.
To Whinney-moor thou comest at last, and Christ receive thy saul.
If ever thou gavest hosen or shoon, every night and alle,
Sit thee down and put them on, and Christ receive thy saul.
But if hosen and shoon thou never gave none, every night and alle,
The Whinnes shall prick thee to the bare bone; and Christ receive thy saul."

So the ballad runs on. If you have given hosen or

shoon, cloak or coat, or bit or sup, they will be waiting for the soul's use after death. Yours to cross over the icy moor, the Bridge o' Dread; yours to quench the raging fires of Purgatory, so that you may win past all, to the everlasting joy. It is only obsolete superstition—clearly Pagan superstition, too—yet I have sat under a peepul tree in the blazing tropic sun and believed it a true thing. By me at that time sat one who had made the Great Renunciation; he had been a reigning prince, a Rajah famous for his personal strength and beauty, his riches and hospitality. He had become a wandering mendicant for the sake of his immortal welfare. "A man's soul," said he who had been a prince, "goes out as it came, naked and trembling. It is clothed after death in the garment of blessings, shod with his good deeds, crowned with his aspirations; or goes naked to judgment, and is thrown into hell, to be tormented by his pleasures and sins."

Why it is I cannot tell; but under tropic skies things pertaining to the life beyond seem to take on an actual living reality, that is unknown beneath these grey English heavens. Sudden death does not stalk silent under the sad city trees, or poison and the knife lurk waiting in the shadows. Life is a well-ordered, solid matter of fact. Everything methodically arranged—so much for necessities, so much for

work, so much for pleasure; just so much and no more for charity—love, sympathy, the helping hand, the ready ear, are forgotten outside what affects the Self.

There is an old Celtic legend that I have heard. It tells how on every Christmas Eve a wandering beggar-woman, with a little child in her arms, comes knocking at the half-door of some one old and poor, asking for "a handful of meal." Many a time have I listened breathless to how the beggar-woman was asked in "for a heat of the fire," while the meal was being scraped painfully from the meagre chest in the chimney-corner, and how her beauty filled the little house with wonder, of the light that glowed about the little child who smiled from her arms; and how after their departure the Angel-throng would sweep rejoicing past on the frosty night, following them, and the meal-chest be found brimming full.

Once only did I ever hear of the Heavenly Visitation coming to the rich; and that man when he died would have many hosen and shoon and cloaks in plenty awaiting his soul—for his life was beautiful in its love and charity. Sometimes I wonder how many would open their doors and purchase unthinking the wherewithal to clothe themselves for the Bridge o' Dread, did that wondrous thing happen now. Very many, I am sure; for the heart beats ever warm

and young under its rime of years. The Christ-Child may not press the ways of men with actual living feet, but He walks invisible, asking for His own, and not in vain. We give, and clothe our souls; yet perhaps the greatest need is one to which we seldom minister — the soul-need. We are all soul-poor, depending on one another's charity. *All of us*, rich and poor alike, are often hungry, often starved. The most beautiful thread in our garment may be that woven by sickness and despair. But the hand that flung its glistening length across the roaring loom may have been that of Dives, alone and wretched amid all the laughter and feasting—also it may be that of Lazarus, lying among the dogs. We cannot tell. But this much is sure—it is not only the poor who come to us for alms—and all alms are not coin of the realm—there is the word of love, the smile, the tear, we are asked for by the millionaire as by the beggar at the gate. The comforted child, weeping out its little heart in the unspeakable sorrow of childhood till you came, may weave into your soul-garment a thread of gold; the old woman to whom you listen sympathizingly will work you a woof of grey; and the violet-seller, freezing in the bitter wind, throw across the warp a line of gleaming jewels, warm with all the joy your charity has wrought. Hodden grey, and priceless gem, scarlet and gold and green. It is

not what you give or what you think you give. It is what they severally found your gift to be, that they give to you again. The old woman starving in her cellar to whom you sent a weekly dole may pass out of your mind and be forgotten. But you will remember her as you cast the soul-cloak about you before setting out on the last journey. It was not much to you, that trifling gift. But to her! How it shines in the various folds! No solitary thread in that garment can be your own handiwork—it is all the offering of others. You must be clad by them. Cloaked with blessings, shod with blessings; crowned by them at the very last. Hunger, despair, sorrow, loss, will cover the shrinking and terrified soul, and shield it from all ill. Rich and poor, old and young, happy and sorrowful, all whom you have encountered in your lifetime will have woven some thread in your outfit. You will have a bit for the Hound of Hell, a plectrum tipped with fire to light your shadowy way over thorns and flood—the triple-headed beast, the fire and flame—if we be true men we shall have met and fought them long before the soul goes forth on its lonely quest—so clothed and shod, and sop in hand, we need not fear to encounter them again. What waits beyond them all we cannot know. And if it be so, that there is nothing for the shivering soul, and it must even go forth in hideous and terrible

nakedness to Whinney-moor, pierced and bleeding, weeping and calling in vain, the memory of past pleasures, of song and laughter and delight, must be our consolation, for it is all we shall have. Of that there can be no doubt.

Seldom indeed does the king knock at the beggar-man's door in beggar's guise, but it does so happen sometimes. And so if we are clothed and have won past all, may not we knock at a door that will open wide on ineffable happiness, and on love that was denied us here, grown to proportions past all human comprehension?

BLOWN FROM THE INFINITE

INTO the intense heat; the awful hush of the tropic day, the far-off shore of Sumatra seemed to press with insistent and immediate clamour. The sonorous purples and tense blues forced themselves in on the weary consciousness, like the booming vibration of some immense harp-string filling all sea and sky. Even while it was yet day, the ship's track was a broad way, luminously green on the oily expanse of smooth ocean. The sky—a pitiless dome of blinding lavender blue, unbroken and same, where the sun hung suspended in brazen effulgence—intolerably glorious.

Now the ship lifted on the smooth swell, now she panted into the trough of the sea, her masts circling dizzily on the shining heavens, with the hush, the torpid, leaden hush, of impending storm, an almost physical weight on all. The skipper pacing the bridge, with an anxious eye on the little low arch of greenish black cloud on the horizon, was, I know, feeling like myself, as if, Marsyas-like, he had been flayed, and every sound, every motion was agony.

Master-mariners are not given to self-analysis, but had he been called upon to describe his sensations, he might have said he "had no skin on." It is a common enough feeling before a big storm, below the equator.

And that low cloud was not pretty to look at. It contained an ever-increasing semicircle of livid green, with an edge of indigo-black, raining fire, violet blue and crimson.

Sullen, awful, majestic, it rushed up the sky till it covered half the horizon, spanning its length with zagging shafts of crooked flame.

And while it mounted, all the world was overhung with that immense pall of heavy silence. The brazen day receded, and was shut out behind the ominous verge of green, pierced by innumerable lightnings. Into the sea beneath, gloomy and dark as Erebus, the fires sank on a line of snowy foam—the advance-guard of Hurricane.

Yet the silence endured, the beat of the screws, insistent and importunate, seemed to drop over the verge of fathomless abyss, where all sound was swallowed up into quick oblivion.

There was only one idea left in the mind, and that an overwhelming desire for the storm to break at once; the sense of impotent waiting, of impending disaster, is too terrible to be borne long: flayed and

suffering, the physical part of one faces annihilation with rapturous delight.

The decks are cleared, the hatches battened down. "We are in for it!" the skipper had declared; but I choose to face whatever came above decks. Not, perhaps, to go down to the depths of ocean, in the foul air, the heat and confinement of the saloon, where Elspeth waited the coming storm. It is at least a good thing to meet death in the free winds. It occurred to me, my soul would have some difficulty in forcing a way through decks. In vain I had been urged to go down. I had already settled on a place of refuge—behind the chart-room and facing the wheel. Eventually I was left, after a stern farewell, shuddering under the impalpable touch of a wind that seemed to breathe on me from beyond the Infinite—cold as death.

A big drop splashes on the white deck; the wind comes up again, stronger now and hot, smelling sulphurously; sea and sky are suddenly lapped in a strange blue light. Then, as if it were under the impact of flying worlds, the air reels and bursts with awful thunderings. The ship shudders in all her length and plunges forwards like a frightened horse, right under the green arch. Then Cyclone takes her in one mighty hand and sends her careering with incredible swiftness into a tossing darkness of wild

waters, flaming lightning, terrible thunderings. Away on the port side a waterspout is dancing and whirling, —a column of black phosphorescent glass against the green sky. The ship staggers as she meets the furious outburst of wind and rain. Now she flies up the mountainous ascents of water, to touch the lightnings with her bowsprit; now I hang grimly on to the chart-room door, while she points to the glimmering depths of ocean. It is like chaos come again, and she in the midst of it; in contrast to the terrible silence is all the wild, passionate outcry of the elements in conflict.

At first absolute terror holds me spellbound; then comes the sense of boundless relief that at least the waiting is past; the worst has come—it is no longer hanging overhead. With the tumult comes a relaxing of the strings of being and exaltation in the cool, the freedom from pain, the conflict. It is hand to hand, foot to foot. The little man on the bridge against Nature in a passion. And whatever happens, surely in such a struggle there will be opportunities for soaring to heights unknown in times of peaceful calm.

The vessel heels and rights herself to meet a great sea. It boils over the bows and goes hissing along the decks, drenching me to the skin. But it heals as it sweeps along. I see the man at the wheel straighten

himself and sigh. It is the magical touch of the deep sea. I am not afraid now! Headlong she rushes down into the trough of the sea, then climbs pantingly up again; it is like being on a gigantic see-saw between sea and sky, and every now and again the great waves sweep the decks and flatten me into a corner of the chart-room, breathless and thankful.

The tumult of creation surrounds us—the primal darkness, shot with intermittent fires. Lightnings blaze along the ship's sides and leap along her masts; the impermeable gloom is rent apart by swords of crooked fire and show appalling glimpses of a sky beyond, blue and serene, where no tempest rages. Ocean in a mountainous expanse of luminous phosphorescence—awesome, indescribable; and through all the din and uproar comes a thin thread of music. Elspeth in the saloon is singing an old Scots Psalm tune; it sounds like an echo from another world, left long time ago and almost forgotten.

The man at the wheel stands grim and stern; now he is holding on to the spokes at right angles as the ship careens; now he seems, by sheer force of will and strength, to be keeping her back from the edge of destruction. Our eyes meet, but he sees through me—I do not exist as an entity for him now; I am simply something unusual, not to be thought of.

I see the skipper hanging over the bridge, tense as a figure cast in bronze in his streaming ducks, his hand over his eyes to shield them from the deluge of warm rain. "Full speed ahead!" We are racing the storm, and on its outside edge. It is neck or nothing with the skipper.

I wedge myself firmly in the chart-room, and am conscious of nothing but the uproar and turmoil without—I am lifted on great waves and carried to the skies, am plunged into depths incredible. Now flung this way, now that, as the ship reels and staggers, racing all the while, buffeted alike by sea and wind; and through it all I hear, as in a dream, the thin, clear sweetness of Elspeth's psalm, "Lord, hear the voice of my complaint!"—and it seems to go on for hours, though it may have lasted only one.

Suddenly a wall of water—black, Cyclopean—billows from below the bows and obscures the world. Colossally awful, it shuts out life and hope. Its sable immensity is shot with strange glimmerings and gleamings of greenish gold. It threatens us with an immediate blotting out. I have a sudden vision of the ocean floor, where "bones are coral made," and wonder if it takes long to drown! For an instant the ship hangs at the base of the precipice of black water, then begins to climb, her bowsprit

pointing steeply upwards, her engines beating dolorously. She hangs balanced on its heaven-touching crest, the screws racing, her timbers all trembling giddily. Then the gigantic sea subsides, and——

The air is full of butterflies! All the storm is behind us, the sea is a plain of sapphire covered with white-maned waves. The sun shines. There is hardly any wind, and a cloud of wide-winged lovely things, passing silent and wonderful in the track of the overblown storm.

Blue-winged, painted in every tint of iridescent azure, turquoise, cerulean, hyacinth, white, and shining yellow, they flutter noiseless and almost impalpable through the rigging, on after the whirlwind and driving rain. As far as one can see, over the miles of broken water sparkling in the sun, this mystical flight of beautiful painted things follows on the heels of devastation.

I left my stronghold in the chart-room, and stood dripping at the side to watch them. On for hours they passed in silent, winged battalions, urging to some unknown goal. The hatches were removed, the lights all raised, and the ship resumed her wonted aspect. Elspeth came up on deck and stood beside me, white-faced and serene, to watch the silent-winged hosts speeding on their way.

"What do you think this may mean?" I asked

her. "Surely no one ever saw so strange a sight on a storm-driven sea."

Now Elspeth comes from Inishmurray, for all her Highland name, and this was her reply—

"They will be the souls of the gentle Brown People who have gone out in this terrible storm."

"Not so far out," said I.

"Then," demanded she, "for what will they be going so far on the green tide, and they but butterflies?"

At sunset they were winging past us still over the heaving waste of sea, a miracle of beauty, mysteriously intent on that strange journey. Out of the void of immeasurable distances they had been swept by the mighty wind; into the illimitable they were blown again. Who can say if they were not the souls of the happy, sinless brown folks, whose lives had gone out in the great hurricane that raged simultaneously at that time among the Pacific Islands?

I stood by the man at the wheel as the last of them fluttered by. It paused over him, circled round his head, flew up, down, and up again, finally alighting on the clenched right hand that held the spoke, its glorious wings opening and shutting, as if it breathed in their beauty.

Then it rose again, and seemed to resolve into the blueness of the sea.

And once more my eyes met those of the man at the wheel, and his were like dark mirrors reflecting misery and affright.

"Come away! come away!" whispered Elspeth. "For that will be the farewell of Love."

SONGS IN THE RAIN

OLD Conal lives by himself now; the last of his five sons was carried home to him nearly two years ago, his dark hair wet with the Lough Neagh waters, his icy lips set in an untroubled smile. Since then old Conal has hardly left the cabin on the bog-side overlooking the wide expanse of strange waters beloved of all the fairy folk.

He is a handloom weaver—a thinker, and a poet whose songs are known to the peasantry only, because they are unwritten songs, recited and sung by those who know his beautiful life, and love him.

Darkness had fallen on me; and I walked across the bogland in the driving summer rain, opened the swinging half-door, and sat down by his hearth, where the turf smouldered in the white ashes, while Conal's shuttle flew to and fro in the snowy web and the treadles clicked beneath his brogued feet.

It was raining with the steady, tireless persistency that only midsummer knows. A curtain of liquid silver dripped from the low thatch to the box-bordered flower-bed, where Conal's youngest and

best-loved son had grown pansies and pinks and southernwood to make Sunday posies for his sweetheart.

Beyond the privet-hedge ran the high road, a tumultuous waterway, broken by yellow falls; the reed-filled ditch, thick with pungent mint and watercresses; and then the flat expanse of level bog, dotted with Noah's Ark-shaped turf-stacks and oblong patches of grey water; then, reaching to the farthest horizon, the leaden waters of the haunted lough.

All the life and colour and joyousness had been wept off the face of Nature. Nothing remained save a brooding sense of misery and chill remoteness; the keen, sweet fragrance of the wet earth, and the pungent odour of the downward-pressed peat reek, blue and thin, brought no faintest comfort to the desolate aspect of things. All the world was sorrowing.

Suddenly there was a faint stir in the clump of dejected meadow-sweet growing on the ditch edge opposite the door; a little dark thing clove the cloud of rain-drops and soared upwards to the lowering sky, filling it with rapturous monology.

Conal looked up from the satiny web and broke the silence.

"I'm thinkin'," he mused, half to me and wholly

to himself, "that the sweetest songs are sung in the rain. Hark, now! did ye ever hear him sing like that before?"

"Never," I admitted grudgingly; "I think it is exceeding foolish of him. Why should he sing like that in the rain?"

"'Tis just a something that's in us all—wimmen an' birds an' men. When there's no sunshine an' the rain's fallin' heavy, we set to an' sing of the sun, the blue sky, and the joys of yesterday. Aye! aye! yesterday was beautiful—'twas ever an' ever brighter than to-day—becas *'tis gone!*"

The loom and the patter of the rain filled in a thoughtful silence. The grey light filtered through the narrow casement by which he sat, and showed me a pure, dreamy old face, and a fine head haloed by silvery hair—the face and head of an ideal poet.

"I cannot understand," I protested. "Why should we sing of yesterday? When it was to-day, it was never what we craved."

The shuttle flew athwart the shimmering web seven times before he answered.

"To-day," he said absently, as one who dreamed while he spoke. "Who knows to-day? Not you, nor me. The young live in to-morrow, the old in yesterday. To-day is too near. When it is coming, we see it bringing all we desire and hunger for.

When it is gone, we see it taking that which we never had. But while it was to-day it flayed our souls with disappointment. Ye never heard, now, a song about to-day that tore the heart out of you with misery for what it lost? But there's many an' many a one that would melt the heart of stone with the cry for vanished yesterday.

"I have a great thought comin' to me sometimes while I sit weavin' here all alone, watchin' the warp an' the woof. Perhaps when we die we'll be findin' stored up for us all the things we hoped for in to-morrow and lost in yesterday, all we hoped to win and looked to keep, all we miss and yearn for vainly. The touch, the kiss, the look, and word. Aye, an' all we looked to be and to do. Wouldn't that be fine, now?"

"It would, indeed," I admitted, wondering at the fine flower of poesy nourished in this old weaver's quiet soul. "Quite beautiful, Conal."

"You will be findin' a lot that time?"

"Yes: all the dust and ashes that the present ever brings."

"There will be good seed hidden in them," reflected Conal, admiringly. "It will nourish the songs you will be singin' some day in the rain, mabby. See now, it isn't till the rain comes ye think of singin' at all; it's when ye want to make the glamour and

bring the sunshine back. We all sing better in the rain."

"Perhaps," I conceded, "if one is sheltered—then it does not matter."

"Ah, but it isn't good to be always sheltered," admonished Conal. "The rain comes a long way down. Mabby bein' out in it without shelter helps once in a while to know the disinherited ones, who have ne'er a shelter at any time. The rain an' the wind teach understandin' to the soul."

A scrap of verse filtered through the click-clack of the loom and the susurration of the weeping skies—

> "O wind; O mighty, melancholy wind—
> Blow through me, blow.
> Thou blowest forgotten things into my mind
> From long ago."

"Aye," agreed Conal, dreamily; "that's what I meant, but could not say. Mabby that's a bit from some song in the rain?"

"I think very likely."

"There's an old story told roun' this lough," mused he, "that the ocean is salt with the tears of all the wimmen whose hearts have been broke since the world was made. An' so I'm thinkin' perhaps the wind an' the rain is full of the grand and the great things men have said an' done since that time,

too. For, see now: if ye take the sword of Sorrow in your han' an' go out there on the bog and measure a mile, 'twill be a mile of space to you, and you can walk across its bounds into infinitude—walk with your head among the stars an' hear all the songs ever sung, tuned into one great soarin' note. That note is the Divine Substance. Once hear it an' all yourself will be emptied out, an' no room in ye for anything but it—the Essence of Creation."

"Conal, have you wings to reach Infinite Space and forget time?"

"Ne'er a wing do you need other than the Almighty has clapped on your own shoulders. Don't we all *wish?*"

"Mostly in vain!"

The shuttle hung suspended on the selvage of the web, while Conal bent over, his face touched with white fire and his eyes ashine.

"Never say that! If the wish is a good wish, 'tis never in vain. When the ground is hard with frost, and the roof drips ice, 'tis onreasonable to wish for roses. But when spring shines, the roses will surely come, for all that."

"Yes," I protested, "when I no longer desire roses."

A curious smile flickered across the old weaver's pale face, and he set the shuttle flying again.

"So long as life lasts," he said quietly, "the heart longs for roses. No other flower will do; an', oh! but they smell sweet after the rain!"

A blackbird fluttered across the torrent of yellow water on the road, and perched himself on a branch of sweetbriar; Conal smiled at him as he sat there swinging lightly, whistling a few tentative bars.

"Hark to that now!" he cried, his eyes dreamy again; "what is that singing but remembrance?"

The blackbird had indeed begun on a reminiscent note. Now he burst into a wandering song, burdened with an exquisite melancholy—an ineffable regret, deep, full, and thrillingly sweet.

Out through the open door I saw the rain-swept reeds prostrate on the sodden grass, the meadow-sweet scattering her dusty fragrance with the prodigality of wretchedness, the drenched sweetbriar paling under the downpour—everywhere the washed-out, weary monotone of Nature's most unhappy mood.

Suddenly a long beam of purest silver shot across the leaden waters of the lough. The rain drew off, and the clouds hurried pell-mell across the horizon, driven before a soft little wind below and some great storm wind far above. The curtain of grey vapour which hid the setting sun was riven apart and thrown tattered in fleecy shreds to the four corners of the heavens. The sun beamed out supremely crimson

and splendid, and all the earth sent up to him a pearly blue incense, faint, thin, and clear.

The blackbird paused for an instant in its song, and dashed headlong into a wild, joyful rhapsody—an ecstasy of welcome.

Conal shook his head in gentle disparagement.

"See now," he said regretfully, "didn't I tell you that the sweetest songs are those sung in the rain?"

THE MUSIC OF THE WILD

NATURE is always singing; her songs are in many tones, in various languages, in voices high or low, soft, small, and very sweet, or vibrate deep and sonorous. All things have voice, expression—

> "List to the voices: everything has voice,
> Winds, waves, and flames, trees, reeds, and rocks rejoice."

They rejoice and have sorrow, repentance and regret. Who has not seen it in things inanimate and stationary? The joy, the sorrow, the happiness or regret? In vast waste places Nature sings mysterious melodies, incomprehensible to the mind of man. And not alone when the great gales sweep, driving the untrodden solitude into clouds of fine white sand over the Australian desert, or wheeling the ghostly grey gypsophillia spheres on endless flights across the Siberian steppe. She sings in the dread loneliness of the waste places where no life is, where the soul of man stands abashed at its own insignificance, realizing at last with a bitterness of certainty that the

stars will not fight for or against him, and that what he is he makes himself.

I have heard the music of the untrodden sands—a wild, deep, sonorous note, high in the blinding sun, in ineffable heat and great dole. Now that music was above and now, as it were, beneath the feet, infinitely melancholy, arrestive, and weird. A note that permeated the air rather than rose on it, or fell, leaving no trace of whence it came or whither it departed.

Nor was it quite melody, that cry of the barren waste, in all its boundless miles of rippling sand, its she-oak ridges and low-grown ti-tree; it was more the echo of the vanished waters of the wide sea that had once ebbed and flowed there beneath sun and moon and low Australian stars. Echoes of great flood-waves, of wild rushing tides swollen by the monsoon along the illimitable shores, rising and falling evermore in that lonely wilderness where none heard, save such wanderers as I. The monotonous, melancholy, never-ending song of the Waste.

On the high and barren mountains, towering to the drift of cloud and mist: to the grey, the blue, the glowing nights of heaven. There is a song, a music in the rare cold airs up there which wind about granite crag and inhospitable rock, sublimely remote and fine. It commands the ear; but who can bear to

listen to its fearful note, its awful grandeur and menace?

Dearer to my heart is the sweet music of the low green hills that overlook the whispering sea. There may one hear the voices of the Good People, the sound of the fairy pipes, and little songs in gay and gentle cadence.

All the sounds, all the songs that childhood treasures and remembers, so that they enter in and become part of one—dreams and tales, glamour and beauty and romance. The glow and sweetness, the joy of life. It is not quite the wind, that dainty delicate fairy-music, but in the wind, on the wind; though it is best and oftenest heard when all the winds are still and the gloaming broods mistily over the mossy rocks, and hides bluebell and heather, bracken and heath in one universal amethystine half-light, or in a blue silence. Then, when the hills are pensive and dreaming, wrapped about in their drifting veil, the Good People come out and sing around fort and dun, or round the fairy thorn. The thorns on the steep ascending hill sing their songs and tell their tales to listening fearful mortals, touching eye and heart and brain with impalpable, illusive fingers, so that they will understand only the loveliness, the glamour and beauty of life, and never its sordid shame or ugliness.

Not many mortals will be hearing the fairies now, and few there be that care to sit on the hills and listen for the music of the gloaming. Yet to those who do is happiness beyond all telling, and misery sometimes deeper than the green of ocean ; but great mysteries always.

The garden has a voice, a music of its own ; an ordered harmony pervades its restricted spaces, and that music is best heard in the dusk also. There is a voice in the wood that never ceases, an interminable medley of sweet sounds. The voice of the wild rose is wonderful ; the watermint, the apple tree, the meadow-sweet along the little singing brook, all make sound, not always audible to the ear unless in harmony, infinitesimally small and always strange. The trees talk continuously :

> "The oak chides, and the beech is whispering,
> And the birch murmurs ; there are voices low,
> Lost in the willow's shiver, slight, half heard ;
> While the lone pine tree moans some mystic word."

Some of us hear all Nature's music, standing with rod and line in some rocky pool in the river-bed. There will be those whose ear becomes attuned at the inevitable moment. Others listen on moor or bogland, and wonder at the song that comes along the way, above the complaint of the plover or the drumming of the snipe.

It is all beautiful—crooning sweet as the dreamy child or soaring to the heavens through the whole gamut of passion; yearning, sorrowful, complaining; joyful, happy, or gay. There is a song of terror and affright among the forest-folk that goes out to meet the roaring of the sea. The trees bend and groan, fling out their branches to the sky in wild entreaty or pain. There are discords in the scurrying gales and harsh dissonances—the sound of fear, for the forest-folk are gentle and kind, full of little happy harmonies, sweet vague whisperings, dreamy tender remembrances.

But above all and through all the music of earth and air sounds for ever the deep mourning of the unquiet sea—the sound of the ebb-tide on the shingle; the flowing tide, eager, irresistible, and triumphant, yet mourning still; and the voice of tempests that sweep over it in vain—cyclone, hurricane, tornado; the monsoon breaking in moonless blackness and torrential rains, and the song of that running wave, fire-tipped and mystical, that leaps along the level tropic calms.

The voice that sings in the running brook, the wide slow river, the mighty torrent driving to the father of all streams to sink in his bosom and forget. To be at rest and fret or fume or race no more—to be submerged in the greater harmony, the higher, deeper note.

When the four great winds are loose on the world, then there is mighty singing over the earth, and all the heavens are full of sound. Strangest and most powerful of them all is the great wind that blows out of a black-blue sky, studded with white stars and a little new moon. The white North Wind, whose song no man can comprehend: his flaming tresses hang over the edge of the sky while he sings to the shuddering world below. Vast is the diapason of his mighty harp, his melody earth-shaken and thunderous; but he leaves the minds of men clean and pure, though they cannot understand him.

And the East Wind blows into us a song of oppression and needless cruelty, of want and wrong and misery. It comes across the daffodils and sings of death. He *is* death, riding invisible yet palpable.

The West Wind sings of love, of mystery, and delight; of low, warm nights full of the scent of apple-blossom and narcissi; of the budding rose in the earth and the rose in the heart. It is the inexplicable that comes suddenly as we turn the dingy corners, and meets us in the city streets, full of the breath of flowers, to kiss the lips and cheeks with the eager reluctance of the Spring.

And the South Wind is the wind of great regrets, of tears and fallen hopes and dull despair—the finality of all things brought home. While the South Wind

sings none will plan or create or build castles, for there is no hope.

When the Preacher wrote of the silken thread, the golden bowl, when the grasshopper burdened him to the earth and he found the sum of all was sorrow, the South Wind blew that time. Had he waited till the wind came out of the west, he would have found that love is immortal and ever lives anew. And had he gone out when the roaring North Wind came down on his arid plains, he would have thanked God for life and that he was a man.

PEARLS AND GREY DAYS

THE days are like jewels on a thin gold chain, each with a different colour, sparkle, and light, all its own. They mark the line of life, and we look back and count them all. The colourless gems of childhood, that were yet so rare because of their exceeding purity. The precious stones of early youth, and the more polished jewels of maturity. Diamonds cut into innumerable facets by keen egoism, chrysolite that was first love and borrowed the light of the sun. Turquoise that was the solidification of ineffable happiness, and ruby formed from the heart's blood. Each the expression of sheer triumphant life, each the embodiment of a day lived to its uttermost; till we come to the pearl, and with it the Grey Day. Look you; on the chain of life, it follows the blood-red gem which glows with the fire of a tropic dawn. Do you remember how that precious thing was made? With what agony we passed through our Passion towards the crucifixion of Self, and woke on the morrow to the stillness of the Grey Day, and the rounding of the Pearl.

After the agony there is surcease from sorrow—no more poignant pangs, no longing, no hopes, no fears. After the pain the silvery silence of the low, grey sky, the drifting silvery cloud, the tall, bare outline of the trees against the shifting shadow-lights; for it is in winter that the Grey Day comes, the leaf is fallen and the bough bare, and there is reason for this, as the Soul will see. There are no bird-songs on hill or in wood or fell, the mists hover across the silent hills, dimly vast, smooth as the bosom of Hertha asleep under the autumn leaves. The winds are low; they do not reach the tree-tops to move the feathery interlacing of twig and spray. The Soul is snatched across the border-line between Time and Eternity, and sits in that vast silence to which her suffering has opened the portal. And there she is, alone, and hearkens to the voice of Wisdom. There is no interpretation of what the voice says. Only the Soul understands. She may not put it into speech, and the mortal part lets her craving fall away like a garment, and is re-born.

Then in this interspace comes Misery, and touches eyes and ears, and bids her look out and see; and, lo! the hidden things are plain to view. The tones that were too high and too low; the infinitesimal things that are given to the ministry of beauty, and serve the seeing eye—the songs that the earth-bound

cannot hear. The height of the stars is not too high nor the abyss too deep but what sympathy can reach to them; and only suffering can bestow that marvellous intuition which makes the world merely a place of call. On the Grey Day the suddenly opened eyes sees the earth green as emerald. She had never noted the beauty or the charm, but for the greyness overhead and around. Each faded bracken is gemmed with a thousand stars; the patch of moss on that boulder by the wayside is spread by the Fairies with softest brown velvet, for the display of those vermilion goblets, filled to the brim with nectar. There is a beauty now in the eye of age, in the wasted cheek, in the steadfast brow. The eye is open, and can see a thousand tints and forms hidden before because of the blindness of egoism and selfishness. A thousand impressions, strange and lovely, steal in on the newly awakened sense—the sixth sense, which is only to be bought with the sacrifice of Self, and is like fixed quicksilver in an amber ring. A potent thing, from which nothing can ever be hid. Thus the pearl among the days is finished and moulded. The Soul looks at it as she sits aloof in the grey isolation which surrounds her, and lets it slip on the golden chain without thought of the canker-worm hidden at its core. All the heart-agonies, the sorrow, the desolation that went to fold

and conceal the misery that lies enwrapped in those iridescent depths, are forgotten in the utter loveliness of the perfect gem. Nor can the Soul ever again sink to that plane on which sorrow met her. She lives on a higher level now, where the old joys look sordid and mean, and the new ones are the joys of others and not her own. She wears her chain of jewels at the banquet of the wretched and finds happiness in comforting their woes. There, too, she finds a life undreamt of—tastes of the goblet of Life, and finds it exceeding bitter, and past all reckoning sweet, because of the bitterness. She is thankful now for the fennel which floats to her lips on the brimming wine, and looks back without repining to that day when she first raised it to her kiss, thinking it would, like Hippocrene, taste of laughter and the sun, only to find it nauseous, maddeningly heady, and dark with those waters that start from the hidden fountains in the heart. Now the goblet is crowned with bitter leaves. That is what the Grey Day leaves to us all: a fennel wreath! She sits at its close with the perfect pearl dropped on the long chain, and the victor's wreath about her brows, her eyes alight with strength and calm peace. The tumult and the struggle are over, she has fought her own battle, now she lends her strength and knowledge to others. She hears the call of the afflicted, the low cry of

unconsoled sorrow, the echo of an anguish that was once her own, and out of her peace she gives comfort, the quiet and waiting of the Grey Day. When others sink in the mire of their doubt and misery, this Soul speaks with resolution and holds up the jewel-chain of life, so that the pearl may shine, a white light in the shadowy way, towards which the most hopeless may struggle, for its meaning is clear to all. Thus the pearl is a treasure whose every layer is a ransom for some other soul, whose value would never have been realized had it not been for the fiery ordeal of terrible suffering, and the strength which comes of victory. These three may come to us all—the Ordeal, the Grey Day which follows it, and the pearl of great price made from the heart-pangs and the tears of sorrow. And it is, perhaps, the only jewel of all the long chain of days that we may take in our hands and carry with us to the White Throne.

GRAN-FINN

GRAN-FINN had called me for a long time—in the morning and at noon, by dusk and at the time of the grey dawning. Sitting in the sunlight on the fine white sands below the golf-links, I had hearkened to it through the slumberous quiet of the afternoon ; but I hardly wished to go—the happiness, the deep, soul-satisfying calm of the rise and fall, the lights and shadows, the silver and indigo and emerald of the sea were enough for me. I asked no more than the abiding comfort of their presence—there is no comfort like the voice of the ocean. So I looked down again on the pearly shimmer from the drifts of tiny infinitesimal sea-shells, irradiant as jewels on the shifting ripples of the sand, and was satisfied.

At Kilmore the great swelling downs have rushed precipitously to the shore and paused on the steep descent, overhanging the ebb and flow of the changeless, ever-varying tides, from noon to noon, as if arrested there by some spell. Covered with the short crisp greenness of the upland grasses, a greenness greener than the wave, full of all manner of

wondrous growing things erect in beauty, sweet and fragrant. The softly rounded outlines along the cliffs are faintly lilac with wild thyme, golden with the barren strawberry and the tiny yellow heart's-ease with its purple eye, stained to crimson with heaths and heather, and the vague purple of the ling—all the sweet, wild, small, and nameless things that look up to the eye with the vague and undefined joyousness of childhood. Each jutting outcrop of the warm grey sandstone is stained vermilion with the outthrown trains of the shepherd's weather-glass; the little wild strawberry leaves are vividly scarlet; tiny ferns, delicate and fragile, with grey down silvery and soft on each hidden frond; sea-pinks and mosses, brown, emerald, and white, with upstanding cups of purest red, holding one solitary drop of dew, for the sun to drink.

That is high above on the cliffs. Down here, by the golf-links, under the shadow of Gran-Finn, the whiteness of the sand is bound together by sighing bent-grass and tall brown-flowered reeds. And lower, on the level shore, where the long roller breaks in foam, the Atlantic has spread out here and there little ripples of gleaming opalescent shells, infinitesimally small, as if the daughters of Mannan had been spreading their jewels in the sun and forgotten them there.

The sand on the white strand of Kilmore is so fine that the faintest puff of summer air lifts it like vapour and drives it on. It lifts and flies and falls, and settles rippling in the sun, only to lift and fly and fall again, as if it were an aerial ebb and flow.

Sometimes the wind takes up the little glimmering shells, drifts them into the blueness of the clear air; and when that happens it is as if the tiny, burnished, many-tinted things had been removed by enchantment from under the eyes that they charmed by their exquisite perfectness.

The wide ocean rises and falls as if it breathed in the golden light, the long wave running to the sand breaks on it white as snow; then, when the wind comes off Gran-Finn, warm and sweet with the breath of thyme and heather, it lifts the foam-crest and whirls it back on the green of the following wave, dissolving it into the blueness of the day.

The shores are very still. The larks do not sing in this late August weather, all warm and golden as it is; the blackbird and thrush are silent—only the seamew cries from Coolmaine, and the curlew and plover call from Arraghidee. A grey-blue heron rises from among the bent and wings a slow flight towards the rocks, sailing under a great snowy cloud that casts a deep purple shadow on the sea, darkening its sparkle to a solemn loveliness. Very beautiful is

that great cloud, like an angel with outspread wings edged with gold, and tinged in the floating draperies with vaporous grey.

There is a shell on the drift near to my elbow, no bigger than a grain of barley. Fine and thin as a bubble of blown glass, transparently light, glowing with crimson and green and gold. Its contemplation fills me with the same strange rapture I remember long ago on a moonless night in mid-ocean, with a mountainous swell under us, smooth, unbroken, wonderful, gleaming with criss-cross greenish lines.

The wind sighs through the bent-grass, and takes away the wonder in a mist of drifting sand towards the wild thyme and heart's-ease. Gran-Finn is purple as a pansy flower, as the sea over a coral reef, as old wine poured into cut crystal.

I watch the cloud go slowly over towards the woods above Kilmore, and Gran-Finn as slowly shades to crimson and soft blue. I can hear the little river singing over the stones and beneath the three-arched bridge, where once a McCarthy saw the bride of his hot youth, whom he had cruelly put to death, washing his shroud in the moonlight. Down the narrow little valley road another stream is dancing to meet it through bracken and bramble and brake.

Nan, Dermot, and Ethne are singing in the bent-

grass; the song is like the echo of wave and wind, with wild flowers and quicken-berries in it. It is about a rose tree in full bearing.

They call to me as I pass. "I am going to climb Gran-Finn," I say. And we all start together.

Dermot sings all the way up, and all his songs are in the Erse. There is one that greatly pleases me, about a tall girl whose lover tells her why he loves. Not because of the little field of barley, or the sleek cows that pasture in her grass, or the little pot of gold hidden under the thatch; but for her blue eyes and her long brown hair, and the lightness of her foot on the heather. Ethne and Nan are a long way below; they stand likewise and sing Irish songs. By-and-by we reach the summit and wait for them, facing the way they come. Over against us on the rise of the opposite hill is the grim old stronghold of the McCarthys, frowning grey and imperishably strong. A fine pledge that to give for a white ferret, with its tall turrets and battlements, its hidden gardens and wide bawn. How, I wonder, did De Courcy feel when he saw the white ferret dead in his hands, and realized that Kilmore would belong to McCarthy while McCarthy could defend its gates?

Gran-Finn's purple sides are smoothly steep, behind the old castle the woods darken away in

softly swelling rounded heights that melt into a thousand tones of violet and blue and silvery grey. The little river sings and prattles up through the quiet of the still day, crystal-white and clear. We hear it as if it were but a yard away, up on the very crest of Gran-Finn.

Through all the hollow murmuring of the illimitable sea, the surging roar of wild Atlantic on the rocky shores, comes the voice of the tiny mountain-rills hastening to its tides. And far below it lies in endless miles of changing green-blueness—now cloud-darkened, now sparkling, shining, dancing in the sun. On the line between sea and sky, a great ocean liner is hurrying outwards, a trail of black smoke behind her as she goes. The Old Head is like a great sapphire thrust out to sea, crowned by its white-banded lighthouse. Across from that the great waves are breaking like snow on the Seven Heads.

The houses of Court-Mas-Sherry, "Harbour of the White Waters," look small as the paper houses in a child's box of toys. The hotel on the golf-links is one of those tiny carved *châlets* one buys in Switzerland.

The bees are seeking in the heather and honey-suckle. Gran-Finn is crowned with flowers, and garlanded with the purple and scarlet of the bramble and woodbine and quicken. The woods are dark

and still on "Cluan an uishga geel," but it is better to be here. It is like being in the ear of ocean, curved to the round of some great shell, and booming with the voice of the wave, of the wind and the little waters and the bees.

The low-sailing clouds come near to the head of Gran-Finn, and lull her to dreams in that echoing music of sea and wind and running stream. The rains come swiftly over her. Mannan, the sea-god, must walk there, listening to the sound of his own mighty voice. Now near and loud and grand, now far off and remote, infinitely sweet and sad.

To live here on the thyme and heart's-ease and heather, and let sun and rain sweep over, might bring one within reach of the stars. But it would be also, like Gran-Finn, removed and alone. Mannan and she will give their lovers great rich gifts, but they will allow no partition of them. To live as on a mountain; to live as on a rock in the tossing waves. In return there will be peace, infinite peace and stillness, but also infinite solitariness, alone and apart. Dermot sings on—

> "O Baltimore, thou wert once the boast
> Of the great O'Driscoll and his host."

In the end what will it matter? For the soul is apart and alone, wherever we be.

THE MYSTERY OF FIRE

I REMEMBER in my life an oft-recurring dream, a haunting mystical vision that always threaded my slumbers from week to week in the harvest-time during my childhood.

Since I have arrived at years of discretion I have learnt that probably the dream was suggested by the weed fires, or the burning of the potato-haulms in the fields. I had always loved to watch them, roasting a potato now and again in the clear white and red ashes. How well I remember the warm enclosing dusk, and the fires towering upwards in the still restful evening air, and I, full of legends and stories that peopled the dark with all the fairy train, with Phooka, and Cluricane, and Luricane Dullahan, and Shadow-folk peeping furtively over my shoulders, in a fearful joy in anticipating the sight of them all.

But in my dream I had no thought of these—there was no one in the world but myself, and I was poised on the edge of a wide and boundless plain, brown and grey in the nearness, with all the fading tints of late autumn, and melting in the distances to

vague, indefinable violets and dim purples, shadowy umbers and grey. There was no tree, no shrub, no tall reed in all the illimitable surface to break its endless monotony. Only the grey-brown grass with its bleached plumes, all blown seedless by the roaming winds. Those silvery plumes stood stark upright in the stillness, for there was no faintest breath of air in my dream, and no sound. Above was the evening sky silvery grey, with one long rift of palest chrysoprase immediately over the line of the horizon—a motionless and silent sky, brooding over a motionless and silent plain, an imporous immensity, lifeless save for me, all colourless and perished. But in it I was filled with a curious sense of irresponsible happiness, because I was absolutely free and could go whither I would, impelled swiftly and smoothly in a flight without wings, directed by my mere wish.

So great was my happiness at the possession of this power that I hardly cared to use it—delaying myself, as a child will always postpone the delight of some coveted pleasure. At length, illimitably far off, I saw a faint glimmer, an intermittent glow, like a small star in the dense shadow of the distance, and I started towards it, as if the wind were behind me circling in a wide, bird-like sweep, ever nearer and nearer the light, but low and close to the earth. It might have been that the wind was myself, or I was

the wind, yet the white ghostly heads of dandelion down or the silvery plumes of seeded grass were never stirred by my passing.

On without sound or apparent movement of the dusky shadows till I came to the fire, burning noiseless, tall and straight in the still air.

By the fire sat a shrouded figure, slender and stooped, as if the invisible arms were laid on the hidden knees and the head bent over them, the eyes gazing at the flames.

I had never any fear of this cloaked and hidden woman, only a kind of careless joy. I waited standing for a while, but no word or look rewarded my patience. So I sat down facing her across the fire.

I always imagined her in the dream, while I sat there, waiting for her to speak. So long as the great hood concealed the face I could see her—a woman no longer young, thin-lipped, and very pale, with white, exquisitely modelled cheeks, pure cold chin, and grave, sweet eyes cast down under dark lashes towards the red ash at her hidden feet. In my dream I loved that face, and knew it well—so well that the silence and stillness of her did not disconcert me, but rather added to my joy. Postponed the pleasure, as it were, till it became too keen for further delay, and I, speeding round, lifted the hood and looked for welcome—and lo! there was nothing—

emptiness, vacancy, the semblance of form, brooding over the source of all life.

It is long since that dream visited me, but I recall the wild thrill, half absolute fear and half delight, with which I realized that, much as I loved the woman I had expected to see, I was happiest alone, untrammelled and free.

It was only last night I had it all brought back to me, with that extraordinary force and directness that colour and perfume possess, wherewith to work miracles in the mind. I was walking along the canal bank in the gloaming on my homeward way. Before me the dim mauve and browns of the darkening had drifted silently across the lights of the town, obscuring all that lay beyond the crowded locks.

Amid the huddled furrows a man stood pressing the long, straggling wreaths of withered potato-haulms and dead weeds on a leaping fire. He was himself in the shadow. No more than the big outline loomed up from the earth—just a little more definite than the dusky shadows around him. Beside me on the quickset hedge a robin piped his melancholy, retrospective roundelay, a song of regrets for departed summer, for the sunshine gone. I had seen that place in all its aspects—in winter snows and sleet, in the wild spring gales and driving showers, in the green of summer and the glory of the early autumn.

And now all at once it took on the look of my dream —a wild, strange, mystical country lighted by that wizard fire alone.

Yes, it was just the fire—fire makes many illusions, mystery as it is—coming like life from some great source unknown, itself the cause of life; it alone of all the elements reduces all things to absolute purity. It, more than any other cause, conjures up the dreams of mankind.

What is the charm of the glowing fire? It is not the half-realized sensation of awe and worship so much as a kind of mental well-being—a sense of security that comes with its warmth; it, the sunshine of illimitable ages past, illuminating the upward path of man.

"It is only a fire of coals," cries the Materialist; "any one who possesses the wherewithal can buy it off the coal-merchant."

Yet there is in the fire of coals, humdrum and prosaic as it seems, a something you never dream of purchasing with money—the certainty of a future. Hereafter.

In the infancy of the earth the fervid sun drew up from its bosom towering palms, mighty ferns, gigantic mosses; the dank, warm winds blew over them, strange and monstrous things haunted them, the silence was peopled with awful cries, as the globe

spun round in space, wreathed with vapours that hid the surface where Man was not yet. There were strange flowers in those awful solitudes—birds that were beasts, and beasts that were reptiles. It was as yet Chaos.

Age after age the forest stood, rising on its own fallen growths, while Creation ascended in the scale of being. Then the sea swept over it, and its tall boughs bent to the wave and storm. Once again, and it lay under the sun, but low and in great wind-swept places where the foot of the wandering beast but seldom crossed the covered tree-tops. Thousands of years again, and it glows on the hearthstone and gives us dreams.

So as we wonder at what has been, might we not hope also for the things that are to be? For, look you, that black mass we cast upon our fire is part and portion of a world gone by, whose elements have all gone to the formation of this in which we live and move and have our being. It is a more complex world, a world full of more highly organized forms and creatures. There is nothing on the earth we know that resembles that earth on which the coal forest grew. The primeval sun shone upon a world of imperfect shapes, things vaguely striving towards beauty of outline and colour. The mountains have risen and fallen like the waves of the sea since that

striving began, and with every wave Creation has risen to higher things.

Creation rises still, and through it all the succession of vitality, the animating fire, the spark of life, has remained secure. It is passing on continuously, though with each change the conditions of existence have become harder, will become more difficult still.

And with all this power of vitality there is no decay in its physical accompaniment. The horse is no less strong in his present beautiful and noble proportions than he was as the grotesquely revolting creature that was his forebear.

Nor is man less physically strong now than he was when he dwelt on a narrow platform amid the tree-tops, or grovelled in caves, or shut himself away from his foes in crannogs off the lake shores. Doubtless, too, all these thought in their day that with them progress had culminated and reached a point so high that it could no farther.

And so, looking back by the light of our coal-fire, look forward too, and see that the Scheme of Things cannot retrograde. Creation must onwards, upwards, to finer, more complex, more gifted beings than we are, even at this day, when we wonder if science and art and evolution can make another step, so far have we come to the finding out of all secrets.

Man is withal as yet an imperfect being; he is

handicapped by his imperfections in many things he ought to do. But he is meant to be perfect; so one might think that this system on which he is formed is not yet completed. The scheme is not yet fully carried out; it will arrive at its culmination later on, when many more steps in the ascent are left behind.

What the new man will be would be an impossible thing to foretell; but he will, necessarily, be beautiful, gifted with mighty understanding and great love, for in that future surely man will be as the gods, knowing good from evil. He will see that evil cannot bring forth good, and will secure its extinction. He will know that the end of all life is happiness, and see to it that each has that share to which all are born, because chiefest among his manifold gifts will be justice. It is concealed in the time to come, lying hidden on the knees of the gods. *Latet in majestate natura*, but it will surely come to pass, and it will, like the mystery of the fire, be seen to have been with us always since the beginning.

THE MUSIC OF THE MOON

"THE music of the moon sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale." Who has not listened to the nightingale singing to the moon? Remember the song with all its accessories—the low, blue, English sky, flecked with drifting cloud; the white horizon where the false dawn trembles from sunset till sunrise; the throbbing stars; the suspiration of the young leaves. All the thousand wet, sweet fragrances of spring, and that wild, passionate outpouring of soul-melody, entreaty, rejoicing, despair, revolt, and longing unutterable, flung upward and setting the silence of the chill night aflame. Who has not felt there was in that song the voicing of thought for which you yourself could find no fitting expression? That the unseen singer in the darkness was putting the thoughts, never understood, vague, featureless, and beautiful, which lay near to the door of your lips, and yet could find no exit? And why? Because in all of us sleeps the music of the moon. The heart of a woman is a mysteriously hidden harp, which waits in darkness till

Love draws forth its divine harmony; a great voice capable of all tones, all depths and heights, but lacking speech, till Love bestows it, and there can be song.

And herein lies at once the tragedy and the comedy of the woman's life. She must wait, and Love does not always come radiant like the morn, to stir her with a kiss. He comes shrouded in suffering, in humiliation, in deep sorrow, and bitter loss. And the gift of song seems dearly bought with these. Yet they are the price, and we must pay it. If you look at those whose lives are unclouded by suffering, who live in the sunshine, in laughter and joy, look also at what influence they bring to bear on the lives around them. You will find it is almost *nil*. They have no power, because they have had no sufferings. They are like Shan in the old Irish tale. Shan set out to seek his fortune, and came, at nightfall, to a cabin in a lonely wood. There he was made welcome, and offered food, a warm turf fire, and a bed; but in exchange he must tell a story. Like the needy knife-grinder, he had none to tell. So perforce he must needs go out into the night again, and find one. After suffering many things he returned with a story, terrible and thrilling, of his experiences, and earned by a night of terror the right to sleep warm and quiet and safe. So with us all;

we must buy our knowledge with many pangs, and always it is another who fixes the price. Perhaps it is best so, for precious things cannot be picked up haphazard. Nor can we always pay the sum at once ; very few do that ; most of us spread the price over long years, and lay it down in pennies and half-pennies and farthings. That is the most cruel probation of all, to buy the song with tiny infinitesimal bitternesses and self-sacrifices—to lay down one's self in segments. Yet I think the music of the moon is never so sweet, so stirring, as when it is purchased like that.

"I do not mind the suffering," a girl once said to me, "it is the loneliness. No one ever gets really near me." Now the girl who said that was not, as you might think, living by herself, and isolated from friends and companions. She was rich, highly placed, and interesting; but she carried about with her the saddest of all tragedies, the futile longing for the thing that was not. And I often think, if it was so with her—surrounded by all that wealth can give in compensation—what must it be for those who labour for their daily bread, who are isolated, uncomforted, and divide their lives between the dull monotony of the workroom and the unsympathetic atmosphere of the room in some home, or boarding-house? These seem to buy the song very dearly,

yet, unconscious as they may be, it is sweetest of all with them. Every girl is born into this world a potential queen. Her kingdom is the home, her throne is some man's heart. But she must be like the beggar-maid in the story, and meet him on the highway of life. Sometimes the King passes her with unseeing eyes, and another sits in her place. Sometimes she mistakes another for him ; and so both miss their happiness, and the kingdom is laid waste. But there is no need to despair if this has been the evil fate. There are other kingdoms, no need to seek far, where a smile will bring sunshine, and a word water the withered roots of hope ; where a little sympathy will set hidden fountains aflow, and bring back the flowers. It is so easy ; and the Queen is always gracious. Remember that! *Noblesse oblige.*

There was a wise old Greek once, who loved talking in parables, and he said, that for us all, once in a life-time, the door of happiness stands wide open. But we cannot all see it ; sometimes its surroundings are so mean, the prospect in which it is set so uninviting, that we pass by, incredulous, perhaps reviling. Then we realize, too late, that we had scorned the entrance to our kingdom, and hasten to return ; only to find it closed. We cannot always recognize our own happiness ; that is the sad lot of

women. Then we must even buy the knowledge to another gate; with bitter longing, with tears and vigils and many prayers, the music stirs and wakes within. How often the angels must hang suspended over the abyss when the woman's soul sings from the loneliness of her suffering. We are all lonely; no one ever comes really near us; it is one of the perplexing things about us that we cannot be consistently ourselves. We are such a maze of complexities that to each and all we turn just that side of us which is brought for the instant into being. We have a different personality for every one; but, beneath them all, the Soul, the Ego, which is the true Self, is immutably and unchangeably alone—always alone, and complaining in exquisite song of her isolation, as the nightingale sings to the moon.

That loneliness is, after all, the most appalling feature of our lives, rich or poor, peeress or serving maid; no one ever gets really near us save one, and he is often unconscious, and often regardless of the fact. It is, indeed, seldom the King recognizes his Consort in the beggar-maid. He looks afar with dreaming eyes, looking for her crowned, dominant, glorious; and so passes by, unknowing that the wistful-eyed maiden in the shabby gown stood holding wide the gates of Paradise. And she weeps tunefully, and cries she is alone. Yet no!

"No one is so accursed by Fate,
No one so utterly desolate,
But some heart, though unknown,
Responds unto his own.
Responds, as if, with unseen wings,
An Angel touched its quivering strings,
And whispers in its song,
Where hast thou stayed so long?"

You may be apart, yet the heart that should be yours responds through the darkness and destinies to your own; and beside you there is always another lonely, like yourself—child, or man, or sister-woman—to whom you may bring light. Consider that just as your soul pays for each lovely note of the song, so with kindly deeds and words and eyes you may purchase for yourself royal jewels for that crown which you must wear when you go forth at the end, "Clothed like a bride," to meet the King, what time the bitternesses are all past, and the King's eyes are blind no longer. Where the door of happiness is unmistakably set wide for you to enter in together, and the song is perfect. For this life is only probation, just a stage on the upward way; and the severer the discipline, the harder the school, so the more beautiful, the more joyful the tones in the singing time hereafter.

THE TURF-CUTTER

THERE was a morning when I rose before the dawn, and went out to gather mushrooms in the meadows beyond the bog. I had filled my basket to overflowing, and was returning home, when I glanced across the moss and saw old Denny, with the spade over his shoulder, setting forth to his day's work. And across the glory of the scarlet sorrel he called forth greeting.

I have asked myself many times, at what season is the bog most beautiful? and never any answer did I get. For at all times, no matter when you see it, the great moss is most lovely—whether it be spring, or summer, or autumn, or winter—for its beauty changes with the time, and is always over-cast with glamour, the glamour of lonely places far removed from the traffics and turmoil of men's ways. No one comes there but, perhaps, a peasant man with his web, travelling to the little town; or a woman with her eggs and butter; or, maybe, the old white-haired priest astride his donkey, reading in his Book of Hours as he

goes; or the bent and twisted figure of the owner of the soil, setting on the edge of the brown bog waters waiting for the red-speckled brown trout to rise.

These pass to and fro, but Denny is in the moss day by day and every day—he is the turf-cutter—and digs from sun to sun, the whole year round.

Still, when I think of it, the bog is wonderful in early autumn, glorious in its covering of thin, diaphanous cobwebbery all pearled and be-diamonded and strung with rubies. All the tall bracken, the heath and heather and meadow-sweet, every branch of whitethorn and crooked ebony blackthorn, each sprig of hazel and sloe, oak, gorse and whin and ivy are wreathed about and garlanded with cobweb, glittering and shining in the level sun-rise. Great whorls of geometric splendour—ropes and lines of spun glass, and all the dainty confusion of imperceptibly fine interlacing circles wrought by the tiny craftsman who weaves upon the grass. Gleaming carmine, glittering gold, silver and brass, white and rose, red and black, and all the air is filled with a floating maze of burnished gossamer, floating nowhither in the infinite calm and stillness of the morning.

"Glory be to Goodness, a beautiful marnin'," replied Denny. "An' how's yourself at all?" Being assured of my well-being, he descended into the

cutting, and flung his coat on the bracken above. "'Tis for all the worrld like Moy Mell itself," he said, with a look round; then he thrust in the long narrow spade and cut the first turf, laying it black and oozing inkily along the edge.

Denny is very old, how old I never guessed, but he must be nearly ninety. No one would know that by looking at him, for he has on him just the age that is ripeness. His smooth cheek is the colour of a sun-kissed russet, his teeth are good, his long body strong and still muscular, and clad in an old brown coat as to the upper part, and lower in knee breeches of corduroy that have faded to the identical colour of the yellow bracken. On his feet he wears the quaint, old-fashioned brogue that our ancestors affected a century ago. Denny served his apprenticeship to a shoemaker, and makes these brogues himself. They are so hardened by contact with the bog-water as to be quite impervious to it, and that is a good thing for Denny, who is nearly always up to his knees in some cutting.

"Sure," he continued, "I niver see the like of it for beautifulness. Wirra now! isn't it the pity ye couldn't be makin' it stan' still for a year so?"

"A year!" I echoed, and sat down on a clump of heather covered with jewels to think of what the world would be like after a year of still autumn

days filled with the jubilant music of the lark. A pheasant crowed somewhere far off in the whins, but the sound was hardly distinguished in the riot of gladness overhead—the larks were carrying their song to the very gates of heaven.

Denny laid another wet turf on the grass to dry, and the sunlight stole in vivid scarlet from the edge of the bog to where we were, under the canopy of bird music.

"I wish," said I, "that thing could be."

Denny thrust in the spade again, and heaved the sod upwards.

"Well, we can't be havin' all we wish for, thank God," he answered me.

"But why be thankful for it?" I asked wonderingly.

"Well, if we could be havin' all we wished for here, we'd be contint to have no better," he said with a whimsical smile that wrinkled all his face up; "'twould be bad for the poor an' worse for the rich, the way we could be havin' our wishes."

I looked through a cloud of slowly whirling iridescent gossamers, and pondered on this.

"Suppose," I suggested, "you could wish yourself no longer poor, Denny?"

"Is it poor?" questioned Denny, thoughtfully. "Well, luk at now; there's worse things nor bein'

poor. Poverty is like this ould moss, ye must be labourin' harrd in it to get the bit at all. But, musha, whin night comes luk at the comfort av it—black an' dirty it is up there dryin' in the sunshine, but wait till it blazes on the hearth, wid the big pot bubblin' over it! 'Tis beautiful then, whin ye do be sittin' along the hearth takin' an air av it, an' ye do be seein' the red heart to it, an' the white ash flyin' to the leppin' flame. Ye won't be despising the poverty then, an' ye do be findin' more in the deep moss nor the turf for the fire. Aye! pure gold—a king's crown is what came to the spade one mornin'—pure gold that soft ye could turn it in the fingers with the goodness av it; a king's crown it was in the ould ancient days, whin there was a throne in Tara, and games at Teltown."

"Yes," I agreed. "I remember."

"An' a man may fin' in poverty the crown riches wouldn't buy."

He spat on his hands thoughtfully, and dug with circumspect eye.

"What else?" inquired I.

"Musha, many another thing forbye," he said, "stone things—axes ye couldn't be cuttin' butter wid', an' bolts that's used be thim we won't be spakin' av; and once a skean dhu, dreepin' red at the edge—rust, they told me. Rust! I know me own

knows. That was no rust, though it's hundreds of years, mabby, since it was wet an' warrm on the blade. An' there was once"—he paused, leaning on the handle of his spade, and looked up at me from under the edge—"Once I dug out a quare long thing, a currah made out of a hollow tree, an' in it two little ould, black leather dolls, ye would be sayin', wid a big bottle at their feet, an' a cake av what had been good soda bread. Well now, God hilp us all to think thim was once filled with the red blood like you an' me. It will be hunners av years ago that they would be runnin' away wid each other, an', like enough, a flood got thim. The floods do be cruel quick in the spring, an' mabby the prayer ye would be sayin' for thim would be no good to their souls at all, seein' they mabby lived before our Blessid Lord was born. But sure, no harrm, for the one life is in all, an' they loved."

"But how can you tell that, Denny?"

"Musha, for what would they be runnin' away wid each other for?" he asked simply, "if it wouldn't be they loved each other?"

It was a very long while ago, but he seemed to have no difficulty in bridging the gulf of years. In his own mind Denny was assured that the two leathern, shrivelled bog-tanned remnants of primitive humanity had loved each other, and they were

merely human in consequence to him, and not hideous travesties on our kind.

"An' what else did ye say? Oh, plenty more, plenty more. Tall trees wid the acorns hangin' on thim still, and the roots av thim down, God knows where, on the other side av the worrld. Quare it is to be thinkin' that they had the sun on them in this very place. An' strings av yalla beads I have foun', an' blue beads, an' a breast-plate av bronze, a silver candlestick aff the altar, an' an ould bell; swords now an' pikes—aye, plenty pikes—an' guns, too. Faith, aye! there's not a thing ye could think av I haven't seen in the last seventy years come out av' the bog." He peered over the cutting edge, and whispered mysteriously, "Ye niver know but what wan av thim 'ill be listenin', though they know *we* do be spakin' av thim. Miss, do ye min' the marnin' I foun' the two little, small, red-leather shoes on the grass here?"

Oh! well did I remember that morning, for it was then to me Denny proved, beyond the shadow of doubt, that my friends, the "Little Hidden People," were not dreams, but reality, for he had found a forgotten pair of their tiny shoes in the bog where they had been dancing.

"Whist now!" he whispered, shaking his head wisely. "Herself has thim still — under a glass

cover they are, an' the bist plate, an' the dresser. Faith, 'twould be the breakin' av Brigit's heart, iv the Good People came for thim now. Well do they be knowin' that same, for 'tis in with thim an' out with thim, day out an' day in, an' Brigit that feared they wouldn't be through the half door, that she's tuk down the ould harseshoe that's bin up afore me grandfather was born."

The sun had risen high by now, and was pouring down a flood of warm golden light upon us, sunlight so golden and thick that it seemed almost tangible. Denny's glance followed my own, and he nodded emphatically.

"Wouldn't ye be thinkin' ye could sweep it in hapes," he laughed, "an' go put it in a chist? That ye would."

"Denny," I began, "tell me, do the Good People still come here, and are they fewer than they used to be in the land?"

"No," said Denny with great emphasis, but very softly, as if he feared being overheard, "I will not be sayin' that; but there's more come to this place, becas, ye see, they do not be likin' the big divil's divarsion they will be havin' in some places, where there's duns an' raths. Murder alive! the contraptions that does be comin' out iv thim motors is enough to terrify the sun out iv the sky, an' ne'er a wan come

here that they'd be min'in'. Musha no! there's more comes here nor iver did. The Widdy Walsh, she saw the Fairy Coort ridin' by no longer ago than last Samhain, all in a trail av white shine—little green men an' the beautiful, little, small ladies. 'Good luck till ye then!' says she, an' they looks back at her, an' says, laughin', 'Good luck till yerself, Mary Walsh.' Faith, 'tis the rale good luck she's had since. So, wid the butter comin' at the two plunges av the dasher, an' her nests full, that she's got the donkey goin' twist to Gort-Na-Cree in the week."

"And did you ever see the Fairy Court, Denny?"

"Many's the time," said Denny; "many an' many's the time did I see thim. Sure ye couldn't help lovin' them, the little happy, green people. An' there's thim will say, 'Aren't ye feared now, Dinny, to be meetin' the Good People in the moss? Sure they will be puttin' a blast an ye.' Divil a bit feared am I, an' no harrm iver's happened me at all, at all, but only good, for they'll be knowin' I love thim. But they'll be takin' me ould hat, mabby, an' puttin' it over a settin' av wild duck, fourteen an' sixteen to the clutch, an' that's good hilp for Brigit whin it comes Christmas-time. An' mabby they'll be stalin' away me coat, an' cryin' to me, 'Whiro!

Dinny, where's yer ould coat?' An' I'll be findin' it acrost a growth av musraroons that would feed a rigimint. M'lord comes acrost me goin' home last week, an' it's what he's sayin': 'How're ya gettin' yer health, Dinny? Ye luk well. An' Brigit luks well. I see her over the half dure.' An' it's what I will be sayin': 'Thank ye kindly, m'lord. It is with us. How's yourself?'"

Denny spat energetically on his old hands, and dug out quite a number of wet sods before going on, while I thought on the singular and sad beauty of that thing, that the Irish will never say "I have," but always "It is with me." There is no present tense in the Erse. They look back in their language to the glories of former possessions, and to that which has to come; but what they have is only lent. "It is with them."

"And it is what he will be sayin'," continued Denny, abruptly. "'There's ne'er a time we meet, Dinny, but what I could be wishin' you an' me could be changed;' and he looks down, crooked enough, on that ould big leg av his, but the poor eyes in him is cravin' peace. 'Faith,' says I, "m'lord, 'tis well wishes can't be wings, for 'tis far off they'd land us if they were;' an' the laugh comes to him then, an' it is what he will be sayin' to me: 'Well, yours will land you high and dry,

Dinny.' An', sure enough, I wished him well. A grand young man he was this sixty year back. An' he luks back over his shoulder, whin the big white horse goes on, an' he will be sayin', 'Dinny, the Good People will have had you in Moy Mell, I'm thinkin', for 'tis younger ye are iviry time I do be seein' ye.' Glory be to Goodness! how can ye hilp bein' young when the heart in ye is glad iviry day wid the beauty that's spread all roun' ye. An' I'm thinkin' the Good Little People do be comin' out av Moy Mell to me an' kapin' me young; for it's nothin' but good they'll bring to thim that loves thim. Ye see, miss, whativer ye want to conquer, if it's bad or good, there's but one way, an' that's be lovin'. An' who set the example but the Lord av all? For the thing ye love can't hate ye back, though, mabby, 'twould dearly like to do that same. Sure, love is life, an' the one life is in all. God gave it in the beginnin', an', when He's pleased, 'twill be taken back, an' 'twould be a cold, sad world widout the fairies."

A lark sprang suddenly from a tussock of grass behind me, and went soaring upwards, cleaving the blue with a blade of pure rapture. Denny followed its flight from under a shrivelled hand.

"They do be sayin'," he said thoughtfully, "that

the song iv the lark is the childer's prayers. Like enough 'tis a true word, for the heart of a child is joy, an' childer will be singin' iverythin', prayers an' all, an' 'tis right they are, for God made this worrld to be happy in. So!"

WIND AND THE SILENCE

I HAD been indoors all day; kept prisoner by a great roaring wind, that drove before it thunderous masses of piled-up cloud, purple-shadowed, golden-crested, billowing over each other, sending forth now and again in their flight sharp, crooked swords of white fire, and quick bursts of clamour, that were caught instantly on the tempest, and flung inland over the swelling outline of the moors.

The air was filled with the hollow crying of the wind, its mad rejoicings, and the cracking of its manifold garments flung outward as it flew, and the uproar of the waves scudding past the cliffs to scatter in white jubilation over the high, grey stone sea-wall. Everything fled before the gale: withered flower and leaf, sand and grass, branches from straining oak and bending tamarisk; and added to the multisonous outcry of storm and ocean was the screaming of the sea-birds blown inland, lapwing, and fieldfare, and lark, and clouds of helpless sparrows, all thrown helter-skelter, this way and that, with raised feathers wet and sorely disarrayed, piteously protesting as they went.

Wind and the Silence

On the one side my windows look upon the sea, on the other there is the narrow road, down which a tiny stream comes prattling to the sands. Sometimes a riotous blast would scoop the little rivulet from its white bed, and fling it in a glassy shower over the tamarisk hedge into the moor beyond.

Indoors the cats sleep luxuriously all day long before the fire, stirring languidly to stare with great round eyes as the wind bellowed in the wide chimney, and the flame leaped upwards to its call.

Since dawn it had been like this, but at sunset the wind fell into the silence behind the sea, leaving a sky of palest opal-green, a storm-swept dome of beautiful colour, with only a few thin wifts of hair-like crimson low on the horizon over the departed sun, through which the moon peered curiously on the scintillating swift whiteness of the tumultuous sea, the vague up-lifted vastness of the violet-painted moors.

On the winding, narrow track, climbing slowly upwards, I met none save Treweeke's collie, which hastened past with a look of the amber eyes, and a sweep of his tail fringes, but stayed for no word of greeting, though he and I are familiar friends.

I marvelled at his haste, but found the reason a little higher on my way. A sheep had been driven into a steep little depression among the rocks, where the whins had taken hold of the tawny fleece, and

held it firmly prisoner. There it lay gripped and held, reconciled now to its bonds, knowing well that Gair would speedily bring the shepherd to release it.

It fell dusk very quickly after that, a strange, glamorous dusk, violet and still, that lay only on the moorland, blurring and obscuring all landmarks, and marring the distance so that things near seemed far, and things far away within touch. Overhead in the clear, pale, rain-washed, storm-swept air the great smooth profile of the twin tumuli, whither I was bound, loomed huge and amethystine close at hand; yet I went on and on, along the narrow sheep walk, and came no nearer.

It was very still up there, after the uproar and tumult of the tempest. In that vast wild, lonely space, high above the sea, was infinite peace and silence—strange dim calm, no stirring of the brown heath and faded bracken, no movement or life; absolute stillness and quiet in all the wide purple-shadowed gloaming.

I think, perhaps, there is nothing so brings us into intimate recognition of our own brief littleness, of the futility of our frets and fear and worries, as walking like this in the half-dark, under moon and stars, with the way hidden from our feet, and girdled about by illimitable distances, with a clear sky overhead.

It brings to the soul such sense of its ultimate great destiny, such security in the inevitable rightness of things, that the voice within speaks and is heard over the petty complainings of the day—and they are hushed at its sound.

The moon waxed overhead, the stars throbbed whitely in the opalescent heights above. Underfoot the soft winter greenness of the moorland path was covered from me. All the narrow little ways, crossing and re-crossing, were lost and dimmed; and suddenly into that silence and stillness came the innumerous voices of the sea, a faint rumour of spent waves, remote and far below. In the gloom I had come against an unexpected barrier that I had thought a hundred yards away.

How evanescent a thing is the little life within us! Another step, and mine had gone out without warning on the upward, unknown way. Far away down, very far away—it seemed a fathomless abyss in the vague shadowy eve—I saw a great, heaving green dimness, and out of it crept the soft, continuous breaking of the sea. The eager, mysterious whisper of the running wave, the thin, clear undertone of the sucking ebb, and the wave urging forth from the gloom with upheld crest of gleaming whiteness, to spread in a fretwork of molten silver on the darkness of the sand.

The wave crept whispering in, crept whispering out, and the dark grew. It was not the beautiful sea I looked upon, the sea I love, but a craving, awful, insistent Something, of supernatural strength and irresistible might, demanding tribute off humanity, the sky, the earth, the pure young moon, and waiting stars.

It is not good to look upon Mananan when he is like that. I went upwards to the grassy mound nearest the sea, and sat down on its summit. Some one has desecrated the quiet of that ancient burial-place. There is a cruel gap in the smooth outline, which Nature has made haste to fill, covering over the spade marks with a kinder hand, filling it in with close, thick grass and moss, evergreen ferns, and wild strawberry, and the sea-pink, that lies within the crevices in spring, like drifted pale hyacinthine smoke blown off the foam.

There is another mound beside this larger one, farther back from the cliff edge, that has also been entered. After all, what can it matter to those who lie within? They will be none the worse, those crumbling bones, those thin ashes, that have lain so long above the infinite changes, the eternal sameness of the calling ocean. Whoever they were, they were great in their day, hence these heaps of earth above them, and the trench where captives and slaves and

kinsfolk were laid to company them on the Unknown Path.

And doubtless they died young, when the cup of life was brimming at their lips, for in those far-off days, nearer the beginnings of things, men's passions were stronger, their instincts still primitive. They took when they desired, and fought to keep it. Hence they lived not long lives, and left life while it was still sweet. Life, love, and death were real things to them, not faint illusions. A man fought for love, for life, and met death as a mortal enemy, to be encountered with a host, and armed.

And in that day men did not carry earth in sackfuls to heap over kings, unless they were great kings, unless they were great queens, they died and were dust, and none remembered them. So the two who sleep together on these cliffs, within sound of the sea, were two who left their mark upon the time they lived in. Strength they had, beauty, youth. Where are they now?

"Here for a while they smiled and sang, alive in the interspace,
Here with the grass beneath the feet, and the stars above the face.
Now are their feet beneath the grass, and whither has flown their grace?"

Whither? It is ill to leave life while it is yet honey-sweet. It is a longing to leave it when the

draught tastes bitter, when it is full of poignant regrets and never-ending sorrow. Men will cling to it even then, even when it is filled to overflowing with tears—then will live on. That is because the soul is immortal, because it cannot age. The body grows old and weary, and the soul looks out of its battered cottage, through the chinks made by time, and questions God, "How long?"

And God sees it come and go, under the drifting shadow of the falling leaf, under the bud and bloom, with the ebb, with the flow, again and again. Change and change and change; that is the lot of every living thing. Yet out of all creation man alone is the thing that yields to voluntary death.

No other creature dies save by violence only. The life must out by all the gates of being, torn apart by murderous force, to let the red tide flow.

Here are the everlasting hills, the unchanging moorlands, the illimitable, mighty sea, and man, who is the lord over them all, lies under this grassy mound, a little handful of bones, a little handful of grey dust. For three score years and ten he may conquer splendidly; three score years and ten, and even when he reaches the allotted time. Behold, it is out of joint. He is a-weary of it.

"Only to Gods in heaven,
Comes no old age, or death of anything."

Comes no fretting of the immortal pent within the mortal, no futile longings for the spreading of imprisoned wings.

And at three score and ten there is no longer power to hold the sword with intent. The mind is tired and longing for the dusk. The eyes are weary. It is strife and tumult, storm and battle. Is it worth while?

A faint cry came up through the darkness to the place where I sat, a little tremulous, appealing cry, and the sound of a multitude of small feet on the mossy path.

I saw him dimly through the gloom. A tall, compassionate figure, bending over the burden in his arms as he climbed up and on. In the dusk he looked luminously real, while the flock of sheep pressing at his heels, near him, after him, were but a flock of pale shadows, storm-driven and weary, meh-ing faintly in voices faint and unreal as the innumerable echoes of the wave below.

And that I thought is Humanity and the Shepherd: a flock of shadows following a meek, compassionate, thorn-crowned King, to the far heights above the tumult and striving of the ocean. It is to Him alone we can look for examples and guidance—the

Shepherd of souls. Upwards and ever upwards. Oh yes! it is worth while, and the time we know it fully is—

> "When the light is low,
> When the blood tingles, and the nerves prick and tingle,
> And the heart is sick, and all the wheels of being slow."

When we go out of the wind into the silence and the peace.

FEOGHDAWN

THE white strand of Kilmore sparkles in the sun, bright as the wild Atlantic surges that race green-blue into the wide half-moon of the bay. A lonely, silent, curlew-haunted place, strewn with tiny shells, fragile and transparent, polished like jewels; many coloured in their diaphanous thinness as the ghosts of dead flowers, raised by palingenesis. Kilmore lies, with the Old Head of Kinsale on the one side of it, and the Seven Heads standing away out to ocean on the other; and midway, black against the horizon, one solitary point of rock, over which the great waves break in clouds of spouting, drifting foam. From Barra Point to O'Donohue's Tower there is no sign of human habitation, though here and there, hidden in the folds of the low hills, are little farms and cabins where the fisher-folk live. The hills are silent in the August day, dim, hyacinthine with the heath and heather, golden with the fading bracken, and always billowing over their crests, the white fleeciness of the slow-sailing clouds. Sometimes in the early morn the mists drift over

them, grey and chill, or a burst of rain in the midday, diamond bright in the sun. Always beautiful, always wonderful, solitary and still, with no voice to break their solitudes save the falling of water, or the far-reaching call of the sea.

This morning I sat in the little church, built amid the ruins of a once famous monastery. The simple house was filled with the fishermen and their women-kind, a reverent, quiet crowd. Four little acolytes attended the old, grey priest who said Mass. Four little children, pure and sweet, who sat during the short exhortation, with their chins in their palms, wide-eyed and grave, like meditating angels. A dove came in through the wide-set door and perched upon an arm of the rood, preening its white feathers. A little child crooned to itself happily in its girl-mother's arms. The wind came in fitfully, heavy with the odour of the sea, and over all, through all, permeating all, the sound of the restless illimitable ocean. Part of the exhortation was in the Erse, part in the English, as it came into the old father's mind. It was strange and mystical—unexpected in this remote place—yet as it ought to be; for it was of supernatural things the father talked, warning his flock against the Unknown. To beware of the thing that could not be met in the Name of God. And ever as he talked, in his low, deep Irish voice, I saw a little

stir among the people, a shuddering that passed as the wind passes when it blows over the flowering grass; and side glances at one who sat immovable under the hood of her great Irish cloak, white-faced and still. I wondered at her beauty as I watched her. It was great as it was rare, and strange, though I could not at that moment see the reason of its strangeness. She had the yellow hair, the long, dark-lashed blue eyes, and the tall slenderness of the daughters of the Danan; but it was a frozen beauty, without life or movement, and she never prayed, but seemed always to be listening to the sound of the sea and the wind. When mass was ended I met her at the door, and saw that her face was like the face of the dead, grey in its whiteness, though her lips had the red of the quicken in them, and her eyes the blue of ocean. So might a woman look if her soul had gone out of her while she walked the earth, alive, and yet dead. And so might one look who had gazed upon Medusa.

Sitting by the sea, one told me her story. He was Peter Lehane, and he had loved her, before the thing that made her what she was had come upon her, and this is what he told me—

"It was about Samhain last year this happened, an' I will not be sayin' it was not Samhain Eve itself, that the finish came." He paused and looked round

him uneasily, out at the changing blueness of the sea, and up to the hills, looking as if they had been washed with the wine of enchantment. "I would not be likin' Them to hear me," he said softly. "Yet you would say, 'Who can hear?' an' we so far by ourselves. 'Twas nigh Samhain, as I was tellin', an' there came a stranger up to Timoleague in his boat. I never saw a more beautiful man in my days. The tallness of him, an' the blackness of his hair, an' the blueness of his eyes, an' the broadness that was on his shoulders—'twas like two men's strength he had —an' the birds might sing sweeter than the voice of him, but I would be doubtin' it. An' I have cause to tell; for he broke the heart in me with it. Well, he came courtin' Maire with the yellow locks—Maire Budh—that would have been mine, an' he put the glamour on her so that she would 'a' gone to the crook of his little finger, though the heart in her was pure as a one night's snow. A fisherman from Clifden he said he was—sorrow on the sayin'—an' the big boat he had was his own. A strange boat that; long an' thin, an' with the swiftness on her, that she would sail in the wind's eye, an' outrun the wind. An' himself was to marry Maire, but he was putting it off, an' off, an' not a one of us ever askin' why. An' every night he put out in the boat an' off to Clifden, as we thought. 'Twas the bitter drop to

me to see Maire waitin' for him at the dark, an' settin' him off in the gloamin'; but I bore up, for I would not let her know.

"But one dark night she sat in her own door, up there on the hill, an' I by the jamb, an' I heard him call her off the sea. Yes, you may well look; but, clear as you hear me, I heard him call her name, an' so did she. Off she went like a fawn. But there was a somethin' in my mind that all was not right, an' I followed her. There, out in the blackness of the sea, was a ring of white light, an' out of it came a singin' that tore the soul out of my body with sweetness. Never did I hear the like of it—never. In a good hour be it spoken, may I hear the like again. 'Maire! Maire!' called the voice, an' 'Maire! Maire!' She stepped in my old boat that lay up in the sand, an' I ran her out to the brightness on the waves. What lay in it I do not know, but I heard a voice call again, an' the sound of it turned the blood in me to water, for it was the very voice of love—'Maire!'

"She stood up in the bows an' threw herself forward, callin' back to him that cried to her. 'My soul for the price of his!' she says, an' with that she would have been in the sea, but I caught her, an' held her tight. 'Wherever your soul may pay the price,' says I, 'Maire, asthore, your body stays with me.' An' with that there came against me the

first of three great waves, high as the hills, an' the last of them was the greatest of all, an' in it was the sound of singin' an' laughter, an' a caressin' voice that talked an' bade me have no fear. Fear I had, but it held on to God, an' cried to His Holy Mother that I might not let her go. So the wave fled away an' left her in my arms, drenched an' still.

"I took her home on my shoulder, with the gulls an' the curlews screamin' roun' me an' the plover cryin' all the way, but I never looked back, or hearkened to the voice that talked in my ear, or said word beyond the prayer that was in my heart that I might be saved from the sea. For the sea was about me an' around me that night, an' the voice that talked was the sound of the sea itself, an' the saltness of it in my lips an' in my eyes, an' in the breath I drew.

"The man that went out in the eve came back never to Maire Budh. She saw his face no more; an' sometimes her mother would be thinkin' it was the grief that makes her what she is, an' sometimes the father will be sayin', 'It is a blast she got.' But there does be a Wise Woman beyond Barra, an' she said to me a strange thing, that you will not be mentionin' to the good Father. The name of the man that courted Maire was Morgan, an' that name does be meanin' 'a man from the sea!' An' there will

be a cousin of mine in Arran that told me he saw him there walkin' the shore in a long cloak of blue, an' a green tunic under it, that had a fringe to it like the feoghdawn in harvest—white as the driven snow.

"An' who will you be thinkin' that is but Mananan, the son of Lir, that lived a thousand year ago. An' as for Maire Budh, I am thinkin' that the soul of her is with him, though how that can be I do not know, seein' she was baptized. But I'm not livin' this forty year without findin' out that there is more in the sea than comes out of it, an' what it takes it keeps, an' what it wills it throws back to the land, an' what it has had will be its own for ever."

CRUX MYSTICA

IT was on a Sunday morning in July that I sat with old Conal the Weaver in his little box-bordered garden, beside the skeps where the bees lived, and the air was slumberous with the murmur of their coming and going to and fro off the gold and purple of the bog.

There the heather was already flowering, the ragweed and losse-strife flamed in the hot sun; the bog lay painted in interminable stretches of gold and amethyst. Lonely and deserted of all life, save the fluttering thrush and silent-footed blackbird, songless now, or the swift sidelong movement of the willow-wren, singing "Sweet, you! sweet, you!" to his mate.

Afar, on the verge of the bog, the hills lifted themselves up to the sky in wavering degrees of hyacinth and violet, the cloud-shadows trailing over them, velvet soft. Beyond the hills the sea broke tumultuously and unseen, but the waters of the mystic lough lifted and fell in sympathy with its mood. Though there was no wind on the shore, and

the lough has no tides, the leaden little wavelets broke with a sighing cadence on its white sands.

All the sounds were but a part of the silence that ever broods over the submerged fairy city, and to them were added the holy stillness of the Sabbath morning—the deep permeating hush which soothes the soul, like the touch of a beloved hand.

Conal sat in his straw chair with an old volume in his hand ; now he read in it, now he looked out on the bog and the lough, or listened to the bees. Well I remembered the story of that book, and his voice as he told me the tale of the wandering king whose wife wove all day long and ravelled her web at night. Conal had yet another old book, filled with tales more beautiful than that, and in another and perhaps older tongue. In it were the Three Sorrows of Story-Telling ; all of them I knew by heart, while yet I was a little child. But far better even than these did I love those stories Conal told of his own people.

"There is a little maid born to Mary Cno," said I, "and she is strangely marked, with a cross between her eyes. Now, what manner of portent may that be to the child?"

Conal brooded in the sun, and did not seem to hear. The bees droned on in the sun-drenched sweetness of the morning, above the pinks and sweet-william ; the willow-wren came down among the

hanging stone-crop on the thatched roof, and called "Sweet, you! sweet, you!" into the slumberous silence.

Then Conal lifted his eyes and looked at the little brown bird, and smiled.

"There was a little maiden once," he began, "a long while back it is; but I do remember her well, because she had such beauty that those who looked upon her once might never forget her. Though it is not because of the beauty I remember, but for another reason.

"And that little maid was of the blood of Sorley Boy, and, like all her race, she had on her head the impress of the diadem; for that race came down from the Tuatha de Danan, who were wondrous beautiful and knew not decay or death till Christ was come. And of all the Pagan races, none knew of that coming save the old king, who sat with the brain-ball in his head, and, looking out through space, beheld the Lord; and the ball burst forth as he fell down to worship; so he died, and that was the first death among them—for they came of that earlier creation which married the Sons of Elohim, before Adam and Eve.

"They are all beautiful, with hair like spun gold and grey eyes that are blue. Tall, with skins like the hawthorn blossom, tall and gracious; but pride

is their curse and bane, and but for that they would be like the angels.

"Now all that race had a great love for the Lord, even when they only knew of Him by their magic arts; and this little maid that I tell you of had a special devotion to Him from her babyhood, for she was never like other children, and always alone. Her mother died when she was born, her father fell on the field of battle, and her kinsfolk lived far away from the old house where her childhood was spent among her servants.

"They all loved that child with a great love, and she wandered among them as she would, and always singing; she had the voice of the linnet, singing between the silences of the eve. Wonderful lovely she was, with her white skin and her yellow hair, and right between her thin brows a cross was marked, as if traced on the ivory forehead by a faint pencil, yet distinct as if it had been drawn in scarlet.

"Now it was a strange thing that that child had but one longing, and she never ceased to speak of it. She longed to meet the Lord on the mountain-tops and kiss the nail wounds in His feet. You will say, a strange thing! But it ran in that child's blood to long for that thing, and none may say why.

"And her old nurse was apt to tell the priest that one day the child she loved would have a

Gethsemane; and the priest instructed her, saying, 'What woman is there who, having loved, has not spent a night in that garden?' and the nurse could say nothing in answer.

"Then this child grew on in beauty and passed her life in wanderings over bog and mountain, taking a bite and sup with the poor and blessed by all for her sweetness and grace. Till at last her kinsfolk came for her and sent her to a foreign land to be taught.

"When she came to be a woman grown she was too proud to be a burden to her kin, and chose to sing for her bread—and her singing was like the song of birds before the dawn. She could charm the multitude to whatever mood she willed. She had the gift and the power. But though she swayed them so, she felt none of it herself; she had the double nature that can feel and compel all others and yet be apart and afar. And she was proud—very proud—and kept herself away, as if the world were contamination, as it sometimes is.

"And she was the offspring of the age of the world and the newness of time; all extremes met in her and made glamour. The world knelt and worshipped, but she remained cold; she had nothing to give in return save her beauty and her voice, for the longing of her childhood consumed her soul and made her scorn them all.

"Some loved her for her beauty, some for her voice, some for the coldness of her heart; but for none had she any return. She was the statue with a thousand masks—the line between earth and sky that none can touch or see.

"But among the poor, the suffering, and the sick this woman was sweet as the child had been, so that among them she was at home and happy. Only she had a great failing, for she had no charity for those who love and fall, or for those whom all women should pray for in pity. From these she drew herself away, as fearing an accursed contact.

"She knew no love; yet the ardent passion of her race leaped full-grown to her when the time came, and brought her all the misery of humiliation, for the man was a king's son and was evil.

"And this woman loved him almost beyond mortal endurance, and yet was strong, so that in the end he hated her, and her heart broke. All her charm left her. She had no longer the power to sway the crowd as she would, for her faith in herself was gone. Then her voice went too; and after that one robbed her, and left her poor, broken, and compassed about by the bitterness of death.

"Even the poor of the great city forgot her benefactions, and had no welcome for her within their doors. Oh! there was no pain, no bitterness,

no want, that woman did not know before the hand of death fell on her, and she turned homewards to her own at last.

"She came among them in the early summer, when the hawthorn was still out and the gorse yet flaming on the hills; and she went back in that time to her childhood, for the lightness before death was on her, and her lost voice returned, so that she went singing through the bogs and over the mountains as she had done in the bygone days.

"And always she remembered the briefest glance, the softest word, the man she loved had bestowed on her, and knew there is no forgetting; and at times her heart was bitter, for she was still proud.

"There came a day when the sea mists crept over the hills and down to the bogs, rolling in great white billows, so that one might think of it as the enchantment of the Old People. And on that day this woman was very near her end, and yet she would be carried up the hills. And on the way near to the top they came upon a stranger seated on a broad stone, clad in worn silks, with the paint red on her thin cheeks; and they stopped at her command and put the woman down.

"'Why,' she asked the wanderer, 'do you sit here? The mists will swallow you, so that you may sink in the bog and none hear your cry.'

"And the painted thing laughed and thrust out her small feet. Her shoes had fallen off, and her feet bled through the silken hose.

"'I can go no farther,' she said mockingly. Surely I may die on your hills, O woman without a heart!'

"Then this woman told her people to carry that outcast down to her house, and she followed a-foot, weak and sick, for the end was near.

"And she took off with her hands the outcast's rags, and washed her bleeding feet, and as she held them in her hand it seemed to her suddenly that they were the dimpled feet of a little child, and she put her lips to them, for in her soul she craved now at the hour of death that strange thing that had so filled her childhood with longing.

"And as she laid her lips on the bleeding feet, she saw on them two blue circled wounds, and fell on her face, crying out, and a voice spoke from the innermost recesses of her soul.

"'But to the lost sheep! . . . Oh, child of mine whom I have signed with my own sign!'

"So as the old king her ancestor died with the joy of knowing Christ's birth, so this woman died and the saints took her."

The voice ceased, and Conal's eyes looked out to the far-off violet of the hills where the woman's

feet had trod, and he was like a man who dreams.

"I do not understand," I said. "Did she learn humility at the last? Does the Lord appear on earth? I do not understand."

"I knew," responded Conal, softly, "you would be saying that thing. But there will be no answer to it at all."

"Then it is only a story?"

"And it is not all a story," replied Conal, dreamily; "for why should not the Master come to those that love Him in the day of their sorrow, when the lesson is fully learnt? And that will be the meaning of the Cross—mystical love, mystical suffering, and a bitterness that is deeper than the sea."

"And the other woman?"

"There was no woman but her of the yellow hair—and she was dead."

IN THE DAWN OF TIME

I REMEMBER in my childhood listening spell-bound to an old tale, told at the cross-roads after the dancing by a peasant schoolmaster to an enthralled audience of peasant men and women. Often afterwards I heard the same story, always with fresh awe and great wonder and the same feeling of impotent searching after more.

Yet more was impossible, for the only one who could tell more than I heard at that first recital was old and blind, and soon to go out where all things are discovered, and would not speak.

It was when Donagh Mor was young, strong, and beautiful, with the fervid youth of the Celt, that he was ploughing in his three-acre field on the hillside. A weird plot of ground it was, centering round a holy well, shaded over by a gnarled and twisted thorn bedecked with fluttering rags, hung there by those who came to bathe their darkening eyes in the blessed waters.

Every rood of the swelling, fertile hillside, enclosed by wavering fences of loose stone, was haunted

ground, as well it might be. The Celtic memory, strangely long for the unwritten story of the past, recalled vividly that Samhain Eve when a battle raged from dawn till dark from the sea to its green summit, and every wave lifted on its crest some golden-haired, long-eyed warrior fallen from the De Danan hosts—long, long ago, far in the dimness of time.

The mysterious angel-descended race which perished in its thousands on that Samhain Eve was no rude people; it knew all we are only just beginning to find out, and more than our finite understanding will ever attain to. Nothing was hidden from them, they were immortally young with the newness of death freshly come upon them. They could be slain, but never grew old; they were beautiful, powerful, great workers in magic and enchantments that were not evil. Nor had they any fear of death, for they knew that even the soul-casing is immortal and cannot perish, but is—in changing forms and varying shapes—ever a component part of keen, joyous existence, while the soul goes on to higher and larger life.

There are some who say their bodies knew no corruption till after Christ came—of that there is no surety; certain this is—they possessed strange arts by which they defied decay, and Donagh Mor proved

this for himself. One day his ploughshare swerved aside in the furrow, and laid bare a white stone that moved him to great curiosity, so that he took out his horses and set to work with pick and spade to uncover it.

It lay not far from the surface—a level slab of smooth marble, on which lay a woman's form wrapped about in a long, clinging garment and with a veil about her small head. Digging deeper, he discovered this to be but the lid of a long kist, covered with sculptured figures, and with an inscription running round the bottom.

Donagh was a peasant, yet he could read Greek—but for his father's early death he would have been a priest. So he was able to make out a name—though the language was not Greek in which it was written—but an older and unfamiliar one. Long it is since I heard the story, but the same I remember as if heard but yesterday—it was Selanti.

When Donagh had deciphered thus far he had a curious longing to see the woman who had borne the name—even though his sense told him nothing could be left of her save dust. It was late in the day then, yet he hastened down to his home and brought the wherewithal to lever the lid off the marble sarcophagus so that he might see within.

It was deeply grooved and set with the strength

of ages, so that the shadows crept down the hillside to meet the summer mists off the sea long before his labour made any impression on the stone hinges.

He ceased for a while, and drank from his palms of the Tobermory water, watching the kist the while. It was very still and lonely there, over the whispering wave, with no sound in the stillness but the wash of the sea and the cracking of the gorse-pods, and from afar the cry of the plover sinking into it like a stone thrown into deep water.

Over him the sky was palest beryl, with a new moon of silver and but one star—cloudless, remote, serene. He was filled with the sense of impending happiness, which is joy. He hastened back to his work, and levered the lid gently off, so that it fell on the loose soil on the other side.

It was dark, with the luminous dusk of the summer eve, and out of the sarcophagus rose a misty effulgence of golden light that took away for a space from his eyes the gift of sight, so that he ran to the holy well and bathed them. When he returned he looked within the tomb and saw that which filled his after life with exquisite longing and vain misery.

At her feet a curiously wrought lamp, golden and set with dull jewels, glowing with seven tongues of mystical flame. The light brimmed over from it, and ran down the marble sides on the furrowed earth.

And in the midst of this soft glory of light a woman lay as if asleep, her head on one side, her lips, faintly carmine, parted in a wistful smile. Her face, colder in its pallor than new snow, was yet as if she breathed an exquisite life, her hair, parted above a broad low brow, ran in golden spirals to her very feet. Her clothing, so fine as to be almost intangible, wrapped her about in white misty brightness. One hand held a mirror; the other, fine, tapering, and lovely, lay covered with gems on her breast. In the hush of the summer evening it was as if the shadows hastened off hill and sea to look down on this marvellous loveliness, asleep in a lucid transplendency.

And looking at her, Donagh forgot there was any other in all the world save this woman and himself —so overcome was he with worship of her beauty. Mad love flamed up in his soul for her. He bent over the side of the tomb and drank in all the marvellous loveliness of her sleeping face, oblivious of death, whose she had been so long.

So she drew him down and nearer, till at last he touched her lips with his. And so the tale goes that at that contact her white lids lifted, and her eyes, with a blueness that was green, looked into his, and she smiled as if at a beloved and familiar touch.

Then Donagh thrust his arms down to lift her, and overturned the mystic lamp, and as it went out

the air suddenly darkened, a great wind came through the warm night, and he fell in the ploughed earth beside the sarcophagus.

In the morning they found him there, and within the tomb, only dust and the whiff of a strange perfume, a few blackened silver ornaments, a few rough gems set in wrought gold, and a lamp, mysteriously warm, as if it had lately been alight.

Donagh was never the same. Lonely he lived on the memory of that sight, seen in the summer gloaming. Lonely he died, remembering it still with rapturous love.

This old story I recalled but a few days since, when a name caught my eye in the British Museum. It is on an Etruscan sarcophagus. Long as it is since I heard it, I remembered at once—Selanti.

She lies on the lid, as she was last in life, two hundred years before Christ came. She is reclining on her elbow, mirror in hand, as if she had but looked up from the contemplation of her beauty to meet your gaze.

She is past her first youth, this Selanti, but opulently beautiful still. Her straight features, delicately pure, her eyes long and subtle; her golden hair parted on the forehead, and waved above her ears. You can see the outline, smooth and lovely, of her round neck and shoulders under the himation

she draws aside to look at you. Her earrings of amber set in gold, her necklace of unpolished stones, the bracelets on her arms, twisted serpents of gold, the rings on her tapering fingers, exquisite in their modelling—all go to proclaim her rank.

She was a great lady—royal in station as in her beauty. She wears a spendheon with yellow edges, a long chiton purple-edged, fastened with curiously worked brooches of gold on the shoulders, and is girdled with yellow, fringed and edged with scarlet. A great lady this Selanti. She looks up at you with a faintly supercilious wonder, a refined hauteur, as if vaguely surprised at the crude age you live in, and at you in particular. Looking out of the vast repose-fulness of two centuries before Christ was born, she marvels calmly at the vulgar haste and clamour of twenty centuries after Him.

Her rank, her wealth, her charm, seem so remotely afar off that realization is hopeless. The spectres of burnt blooms, raised from their ashes by science, seem not less unreal than this woman from an incompre-hensible past in the dawn of time.

Yet she lived, and was as tangible, cast as dark a shadow in the sun, as you or I; loved and sorrowed and died. Only, being alive in the youth of the world, the new wine of youth was hers. The fresh-ness of its joys, its bliss, the passion of not long

created life, of the which impelling delights, vast loves and hates, and joys and sorrows we express but a feeble echo, we are but vague suggestions—visionary efforts at the recollection of a primal strength and vigour that she knew. What life that must have been! How full and beautiful, and yet serene. Selanti looks as if she had lived it to the uttermost. Now look below her.

On the edge of the sarcophagus are the trifling accessories to her beauty—mirror, strigil, situal, and within——

A handful of delicate bones, the colour of old ivory.

Selanti of the low Irish shore, on whom Donagh looked in the charmed dusk, and lost his soul in the meshes of her golden hair, resolved into less than this. Across the ages it is the same—had they died but yesterday the gulf is no less wide that rolls between death and life. These two women had the same name. One was buried on the sun-parched plains of Italy; the other by the complaining, murmuring Western sea. Yet both are within the sound of passing feet and surrounded by the tide of human life, and both belonged to a civilization which had a secret that is lost to us.

What they were, that ancient race that started from the land where burning Sappho loved and

sung and died, no man can ever know. By whatever names they disguised themselves—they are written always in history as gifted with strange knowledge, beautiful, milk-skinned, golden-haired, blue-eyed. Masters of men—a race of wandering princes whom none could conquer. And wherever they have been there is always this tale of an opened tomb, wherein lies a woman, wondrously beautiful, with a lamp burning mystically at her feet to light the silence and dark of her eternal slumbering.

THE CHURCH OF THE FOUR WINDS

MANY tales have I heard of that strange prevision called second sight, the vision that sees through the stone wall of the present, beyond to the future, and looks upon what is to come. Strange things, and terrible, are told of that gift; but never so beautiful an experience as that of Conal the Weaver, who heard Mass in the Church of the Four Winds, and was given the Sacrament by the side of his drowned son, Shan of the Yellow locks.

Brigid told me that story at a time when I but dimly grasped all its mystical holiness; and later, when I was a woman grown, and with the shadow of a great sorrow over me, Conal told me the story himself.

It was a wild evening in March, and I sat on the low bench in the wide ingle-nook, looking through the little heart-shaped opening in the chimney wall, and out through the half-door that hung always open to the hands of the passer-by.

It was a high, cold, roaring wind, that had swept

the sky of all save some thin fragments of scarlet cloud, scattered like fine haze, on a dome of steely blue. Framed in the little opening was the narrow path where the ranunculus was putting forth its dusty blooms, and the top of the gate, beside which the whitethorn stood in its veil of snow, as if it were a vestal maid upholding the thin sickle of the new moon.

The heaped-up fire of peat smouldered rosily on the hearth, and with every puff of air down the chimney an almost impalpable cloud of white ash was lifted off the hot clods and left on my black dress, where it fluttered as if endowed by the wind with life and wings.

Conal sat facing the fire in his beehive chair of plaited straw, the leaping flame now showing his face, fair as one of the Crois na-Aingeal to whom we pray, and now illuminating it with the vast ineffable age of one who has known all love and suffering and loss. Love, and suffering, and loss; I but guessed at these then—what time I only was aware of his deep tranquillity of soul, his calmness and strength, and a mighty will that was all tenderness and pity. So that the suffering and helpless turned to him involuntarily for comfort and sympathy, as the weak ever turn to the strong.

"Sorrow not for the dead, agra," he said, softly,

and through his words came the sounds of the shingle dragging down the shore of the dark lough far below.

Conal heard it with the ear of his mind, as I heard it with mortal ear. I think that sound must have been with him always, as the dark waters were ever before his eye.

"The wind blows high," he went on, in that dreamy voice which seemed to me more like the voice of thought than anything I have ever heard. "The wind is high. The waves will be carrying many a heart on their flow over the wild sea of Moyle. Can you hear the black Bann battering on the ramparts of Coleraine? Aye, many a soul will go up this night on the Four Winds to its last sacrament."

"What then?" I asked. "Is there a sacrament for the dead?"

"There are no dead," responded Conal, clasping his transparent hands over the old calf-bound folio he had been reading. "No dead. Even when we have done with the gross earthly garment which clothes us it does not die; it is imperishable as the soul itself. Therefore, why mourn? If change is death, then we die day by day, for the garment of flesh is rent and torn and soiled even while it is worn, so that it changes beyond recognition. When

it is entirely cast aside the fine essence which made use of it has no longer that need.

"Yet I too once loved the garment, for the sake of the wearer, and loved it beyond all bounds, so that when sudden destruction fell upon it, my agony burst through the bonds of being, and I became as one of those who have passed on.

"I will tell you of that day, asthore, and the thing that befell me on it. It may have been twenty years ago, it may have been less. How can I tell, who have forgotten the flight of time, and live only in the days that are gone? It was on an April morn, the second of the month, and it broke warm and sweet as the kiss of a young girl, full of the singing of birds and the scent of thorn.

"A beautiful morn, full of the music of life—it brought me to an eve wherein I learned the knowledge of the impotence of Death; yet it seemed to me on it, as I watched my best-loved and youngest son go down with his nets to the dark water, that I desired no better gift from God than the present, in which I knew and had him, in all the flush of his youth and manly beauty.

"On that morn I clung to the sight of him, following his steps long after he had passed out of sight, in my mind going on beside him to the landing-stage, with the children running after his

heels and the old women calling a blessing on his feet—for old and young love those who are early taken away. Alas! that I did not see that the sooner!

"And long after his boat had gone round Coney Island towards Antrim, I stood looking over the shining sea of silvery water, wondering at the strangeness of it, that was like a white sun under the wave. And yet in my mind that was no imagining the homeward set of his feet, or the warm clasp of his hand; but only void, beyond which I could not go.

"I was restless all the morn, could not work nor yet read in my books, and there was no thought or song on the end of the crow-quill, only dark blots that stained the page like tears of night.

"It was, maybe, high noon that the wind came—suddenly, without warning, out of a pale clear sky. High and very cold—I saw it coming across the lough, blotting out the light and warmth, ruffling up the water into a surge of white-capped waves that sprang high round the shores of the islands and leaped on the wood-strewn shore like spent wolves.

"Long I stood on my threshold watching that sight. Years it seemed to me, who only measured time by the length of my own immeasurable agony; for when I looked first I had seen the sun on the

white sails of the fishing-boats, and when the wind had reached the shore they were gone. Mavrone, my sorrow! Like candles blown out by the blast.

"And it was at that moment I heard my son call. 'Father, father!' came the voice—not in terror or pain, but as if he stood out in the garden among his flowers, or leaned on the wall below the thatch by the bush of sweetbriar there. Oh, the hearing of it! For I knew! I knew! and my soul was full of the odour of death, and the smell of the damp earth falling on the coffin-lid.

"Still I stood there in my door, not heeding the things my eyes saw, not noticing much the turf-stacks sailing away off the bog-lands; nor feeling pity in my heart, when William Fearon, who was ploughing in his field, came down with his two horses, the handles of the plough yet in his strong hands, and lay bleeding across the road from me.

"I saw William's house lifted off its foundations and cast into the lough, and though I knew Ellen Fearon and her new-born child were in it, I could only think of Shan, my son, with the wild lough waters foaming over his yellow head, and his eyes under the wave, unseeing and blue.

"It was not till the steeple of Columb Kil, that had over-looked the bog for as many centuries as the saints had years, went slithering, wavering over

on the cottage roofs of Drumcree, that I came to consciousness again, and was overwhelmed by the bitter anguish of death, for death had taken my all.

"I feared the lough no longer, nor the wild roaring of the tempest, nor the fall of brick or stone, but rushed headlong to where I felt Ellen must be lying with her child, and brought them out into the cold roar of the hurricane, crushed, maybe, and numb, but alive; and I lifted the child to my heart to see if it was yet living, when I heard once more my Shan's voice calling—not with calmness now, but haste in its tone, and urgency—'Father, dear! father!'

"I turned at that, and, with the child hugged in my coat, I went out into the roar of the flying tempest; and suddenly darkness was all around me, darkness and rain; and only the voice through it all to direct my steps.

"Then it came to me that I was being hurried for something of great moment to my son, and at the thought once more I was filled with the terrible throes of mortal anguish—the loss, the poignant misery, the awful sense of my own weak impotence filled me so that I swayed on my feet, while still the voice called me on, guiding, exhorting, caressing me. And he dead!

"The misery of the moment had burst the doors

of my heart asunder, and put me outside the pale of the living. I was no longer in the world, but among the disembodied—though I knew it not at that time.

"Long, long hours, it seemed to me, I pressed on across bog and mountain, till I came at last to a little church set on a narrow plain on a mountain over the sea, for the sound of raging waters came up to it on all sides, and the tempest fled round it in tumultuous outcry, now loudly and now low.

"I went up four wide white marble steps, bleeding my heart's blood on every step, and, with the great north-east wind behind me, entered the church.

"It was full of a white light, that streamed from the high altar, and out through its four wide-set-open doors.

"And I was alone in that church, I thought at first, because I could see no one, and at first I thought there was silence in it, so fair and white was it, and with the incense filtering faint and blue down the narrow aisle.

"But presently I knew that was not silence but perfect harmony, for in it all the Four Great Winds were singing in high sweet voices that filled heaven and earth, while in between were smaller voices of an innumerable choir singing the Mass—and it was the 'O Salutaris.'

"I knelt on the marble floor and listened, and knew I had outstepped the bounds allotted to mortality, and was in one of the holy mysteries, but I held the little new-christened child to my heart and hearkened to the winds and the waters of the earth singing of the Great Sacrifice, articulate and clear.

"Yet in the agony of my broken heart I was only conscious of one prayer: my son, my son, who knelt beside me invisible. Could I but see his face once more!

"Yet I did not say to the Priest at the altar, whom I knew to be the Christ, our Master, that I would be content or reconciled to His will. Only my whole being resolved itself into that one prayer—to see the face of my beloved once again. That church was filled with longings for the dead. Out from the rain and darkness the Four Winds swept in through the aisles, bringing the souls of those gone out in the waves. I heard them pass me by, with the water dripping from their garments—could perceive the keen sweet smell of the sea, the musky odour of great rivers, and the leafy dampness of inland lakes. Invisible they pressed by me, invisible Shan knelt by my side—I was the only living soul in all the throng of the dead.

"Suddenly the voices ceased, and the sacring-bell rang out, and as each stroke smote on the

hollow metal a third of my grief fell away from me, and left only a kind of arid waiting and expectation. I knew I was to see Shan, but *how* I could not tell. 'Yet,' thought I, 'be it as it will; if I can only look on him again.' On the third stroke of the bell the Priest turned at the altar and, stooping down, in a refulgent haze of glory, looked at me with sweet, piercing, awful eyes—eyes that were yet so compassionate and tender and comforting that they drew me up to the narrow rail. I knelt down, with the white cloth uplifted in my hands. On the one side of me at that holy rite was my dead son, on the other was one whom I had known as my enemy, and in peace we were together. I, the living, between the dead at the Communion of the Drowned.

"And as I partook of that sacred feast my eyes opened, and I saw all the great company of souls that had gone out in the whirlwind awaiting their turn, and my eyes met those of my son, and all my sorrow dissolved and melted away, for I saw there is no death—only change.

"All the Winds sang the 'Gloria' while I looked, and I saw the Winds—four tall angels, standing together, with garments strained as if they were flying, and hair like the sun, streaming far behind them into vague darkness, singing in rapt harmony.

"And Shan smiled on me, with the light of

immortality in his blue eyes, and a three-gemmed crown on his yellow head. And I knew why he had been taken out on the wind, and why my love for him was so great.

"All things came to my knowledge; I knew them all—I saw life imperishable, youth everlasting, and a future so joyful that the woeful souls of the drowned, clinging faint and vapoury to the Master's table, gained form and shape at the light from its borders.

"'Gloria! gloria! gloria!' I sank into the Divine sweetness, the vast rapture of that song, and was filled with the wisdom of content. Child, you once asked me if Christ walks the hills of earth, and I could give you no reply, for there are some questions to which one may give no answer, and so do not ask me how I, being alive and wearing the garment of flesh, came to be in the Church of the Four Winds, where only the dead can go. But I will tell you this: though there be no death, *Love is omnipotent* and all-powerful; and whether it be by air or earth, by fire or water, that we go, yet is Love certain. And for those who know are the throne and the blossoming rod and the three-gemmed crown waiting. And to such to be prisoned in the body is the sole and only ill."

THE QUEST OF LORNACH OF BANBA

CONAL told me this old tale on an Easter morning, walking among the daffodils and snowdrops, while the spring airs blew full of white violet off the rath of Darra:

It will be a long while since this thing happened (said he), an' few will be caring to hear of it now, for beauty of ear may change, as beauty of face, and what we love to-day is to-morrow distasteful. But to you and to me this will be ever beautiful; for it is true. There was in Banba at the beginning, as often I have told you, a race sprung from the angels—the Tuatha de Danan. That race worshipped God in the sun, and they knew all things that are permitted. And it was one of them, an ancient king, went forth to meet his enemy on the battlefield—and the leader of these; the dark little people flung a brain-ball, and it lodged between the king's brows, and took away the sight of his eyes.

So that old Pagan king sat in the darkness many a year, but the knowledge in him was like an eye

that saw all things over the world. Now, from the beginning that race had looked to the coming of the Lord, longing and sighing for it—hoping at that day they might at last seek the heaven they had lost at the Flood.

That old Pagan king sat in bodily darkness, with the sound of the running wave in his ear, and the song of the lark through it all, his crown on his head, his great two-edged sword in his hand, and his shield at his side, searching the world by that light within him.

They loved each other, this race, and this king's son loved him with a deep and wonderful love, for he was friend as well as father. Thick was the bond between them—for it was the bond of the spirit. So that when, one morning in winter, while the snow lay thick and the flocks crept nigh to each other in the pens because of the bitter cold, Lornach, the king's son, hearing his father's sword clang on his shining shield, ran out to him and found him erect, holding on to the arms of his throne.

The brain-ball had burst forth from his brain through excess of great joy, and the life was ebbing out of him quickly.

And the joy of that old king was as the joy of some captive boy who is put to the torture and presently opens his eyes on Paradise the Blest.

"My son! my son!" cried he. "He that is to save the world is born—I have seen Him."

And with that he died.

Then was Lornach Bawn king over Banba, and ruled its green sweet plains and sunny mountains and wide rolling rivers sparkling to the sea. But no happiness had Lornach in his kingdom, for his mind dwelt always on that Mystery of which his father's dying lips had spoken, and great longing filled him to go forth and seek the infant Redeemer.

At last he called together the priests and priestesses of the Sun, and spoke to them in Tara, the crown on his head and his father's great two-edged sword in his right hand. Lovely was Lornach of the Yellow Hair: white and tall and very strong, and no maiden ever smiled on him but gave him great trust, as did the mothers of his people, for his heart was pure. And there he told them all that he had no rest, for that his soul pined eternally to see the Lord; so he had built him a tall ship, and laden her with gold and rich gems and fine linen, and would forth to seek the land where Christ was born to save men.

He lifted the crown off his brows and laid it on the head of his sister Brigid.

"Do thou care for my people till I return," said he; and forthwith the ship sailed and left them.

Over many strange seas, through many strange

lands, wandered Lornach the king, and in each land he saw great oppressions and much misery, and, great as was the treasure he had bought, it dwindled and went, till at length there was only remaining that which he had brought to lay at the feet of the Lord. One day he saw a husband being carried to slavery from his wife and infant son, and, taking counsel with his foster-brother, Hugh of the Hostages, he ransomed that captive with a portion of the tribute he had brought to the Lord. And also again he brought out of prison the son of an old man and his wife; and paid for the care of a widow and her children—these things again and again, till at last they came to Palestine, and there on his landing they found at the wayside a dead man, naked. And him did Lornach the king of Banba, with a grieving heart, wrap about in the fine linen, fair as snow, that he had carried so far for Christ the King of Heaven. Then empty they went on to Jerusalem, Lornach and Hugh his foster-brother, having buried the man and left him in peace.

They came to Jerusalem in the nightfall, and no place would take them in. For they were Pagans, and it was the Passover of the Jews. Great crowds had come up to it, and they wandered about that city all night, thinking strange thoughts. In the morning, still fasting, they were caught among the multitude, and carried out beyond the city to a hill

overlooking its walls. And there the crowd set up a cross, between two other crosses, and hung on it a God-like form. When Lornach saw that he fought his way, little by little, to the inner edge of the great crowd, and at last about high noon he saw the face he had come so far to see—and knew it was the Lord.

And madness came upon him, so that he fell upon his face, and lay for a time like one dead. Then he rose, and as he came to his feet his eyes were met by the eyes of Him who hung there on the cross—and the madness came upon him again, so that he drew the great sword and rushed about the crowd to slay them. And at that moment came a voice which moved the foundations of the world, so that they came together at the sound of it. And darkness covered all things. When it lifted, lo! Lornach was sitting on his throne in the hall of Tara, with Hugh his foster-brother at his feet, and his sister Brigid bending over him.

Strange was that thing—and stranger the tale he told to Banba. But the people who had waited so long knew their salvation had come, so that they were a Christian folk long before the nations of the earth had heard Christ's name.

But Lornach raged and grieved in his heart, and his soul would not be still because of those who had killed the Christ. And one night when he could not

sleep he walked above the sea, in the oak wood of Darra, weeping within him, though no tears were on his cheek, and reproaching himself bitterly with great anguish that he had squandered the treasure of tribute he was taking to his Master.

And suddenly One walked beside him in the darkness, and His garments were like the starshine on a summer eve. Then Lornach fell on his knees, looking upwards with worship.

"Lornach!" said the Voice of Love, "why wilt thou not be at ease? See, I am not dead."

Then said Lornach, "Lord, I knew they could not slay Thee—that evil, black-browed folk. But my heart is sore within me that I had spent all on others of that I brought so far for Thee——"

Then it seemed suddenly to the king's eyes as if the Vision wore on Him all those rich gems and fine golden work that he had sold to ransom poverty and sickness and imprisonment. And said the Vision:

"Lornach, remember this—that even as ye did it to one of them, ye did it unto Me. Farewell till that day when ye are summoned to Me."

And Lornach went back to his bed and slept, and woke, and was content, and so in that holy content he lived till his death-day dawned and he went out to find his Lord again.

This will be an old story, little girl of my heart.

But old things are full of wisdom. Many go afar into strange lands and spend all they would fain give to God on their common kind, thinking at the last they have squandered it, till He tells them it has been given, first and last, to Him.

THE FIELD OF THE GOLDEN FLOWERS

IN springtime the boreen over Mullaghmore Moss is like a by-road through Paradise. It is a wide, long stretch of bog, with not many cuttings in it, so that the brown bog waters show here and there grown thick with meadow-sweet and flags and reeds, and over-covered with white and golden water-lilies, the broad leaves faintly crimson under the tender green.

And a little brawling river runs through it, widening now and again into still pools, where it seems to meditate in the shadow of whin and bracken and whitethorn before pouring its amber waters into the welcoming sea. The road is, as I said, just a boreen, all covered over with that curiously soft, short, vividly green grass that is nowhere to be seen in all the world save on the boglands of Erin.

I wish I could remember all the sweet, fragile, lovely things that grow along that road—all the scarlet and blue and yellow flowers, infinitesimally small, so that if it were not for the multitude of them the eye might pass their exquisite wonder by.

But I recall the wild strawberry, later covered with ruby fruit, sweeter than nectar, more fragrant than the frangipani flowers, and the tiny blossom that, because of its heavenly blueness, the Irish people call "Our Lady's eyes." The primroses and wild violets, purple and crimson orchis, lady's slipper and pimpernel, and the close-growing wild thyme beloved of the wandering bee, and thickets of tall meadow-sweet, of scarlet-blossomed sorrel, and slender-stalked harebell, swinging like fairy chimes in the wind—all these and those others whose names were never known to me.

All along that way at intervals grew clumps of blackthorn and sloe, so that in the early spring it seemed banked by mounds of fragrant snow; later, when these were gone, it was painted yellow with gorse, where the Good People's shoemaker plied his trade in the silence. Many a time and oft have I sat in the sun and hearkened to the tip-tap, tip-tap of his tiny hammer.

As for the level bog itself, no words could paint its glory or give rendering of its scents and sounds. The skylarks nested there, among the reeds and flags and tall grass tussocks, in their thousands; the snipe drummed, the curlew built, the crane talked with wild duck and plover. The heather bloomed with the whins and gorse, hawthorn and blackthorn and

blackberries. It was a children's paradise, and there was no child to revel in its glories and joys save myself alone.

But it was not in my little childhood that one day I walked along it in the late spring, rejoicing in its loveliness, conscious that in my own heart there was a voice that sang near the blue sky, even as the skylark did. The bog ran upwards to the feet of two tall sloping mountains where the clouds haunted the purple and gold of heather and gorse, their tall tops hidden by a whirling haze of white. It had been one of my childhood's fancies that those aspiring peaks reached to heaven, and could I but climb there I could look within. I was minded on this glad morning whereof I write to achieve my childish longing and climb to the very summit of the taller mountain, when I heard a soft sound of wheels on the grass behind me, and saw Conal coming, walking by his low cart, while the old grey ass plodded along, with the finished web carefully wrapped in an enormous gay handkerchief reposing among the hay behind him.

"We can go together," said I, "as far as you will let me."

And said Conal, "An' why not then?"

The old grey ass plodded silently along the grassy boreen; there was no sound but the glad

rushing of the wind, the song of the lark, and the soft complaining of the worn wheels. A long white cloud came over the mountain feet and turned all the bog waters to ivory black, like mirrors reflecting the charm and beauty of the wild day. We did not talk much, Conal the Weaver and I, for he was thinking deep, his hands behind him, his white head bent. I wondered, as he smiled, what thoughts they were he had woven into the web of fine linen that lay in the little cart.

Nor had he asked me whither I would be going; that was so like Conal—to take one into his way as he went, and let one fall out of it when one would, without question. We came at length to the broken culvert over the rushing brook; all the beams were coated thick with moss, brown and emerald and golden —bright as velvet and as soft, with the amber water flashing in between, and the tall green flags reaching to us as we went over.

Across the culvert was a little farm—a tiny, low-thatched house, where the birds built near to the rose-clustered windows, in their little white frames, with houseleek blossoming along the ridge and round the chimneys, and a Pyrus japonica trained round the wide-open, bright-green door.

An orchard lay on each side of it, and past the farthest orchard, laden with April bloom, a small field

enclosed with a low stone fence—a little smooth green field, in which the grass was hidden by the growth of dandelion blooms.

The house was Mary Donnelly's—old Mary Donnelly, whose three tall sons had died in the South African war, and whose daughter had died in India, leaving her a lone woman with only one little granddaughter of all her kith and kin.

She was sitting in the middle of the golden field, her little old face enclosed in a snowy-white goffered frill, her slender shoulders covered with a crossed-over blue shawl, and her long white apron held open towards a small child, who was filling it with the dandelion flowers.

It was such a pretty child, very slight, and swift as a bird on the wing, with a short mop of silken hair, yellow as the golden flowers she gathered, and a face all smiles and sunshine. Her dress was pretty, too—just a short smock of thin white stuff that hardly reached to her rounded knees.

She was playing with the old woman, as irrepressibly gay as a child could be, her little brief peals of thin laughter coming past us on the wind like music. Sometimes the wind would bring with it a burst of white-and-pink-tinted petals, showering them over the yellow head and the white-capped one, and covering the flowers. Sometimes it would take hold

of the seeded dandelion globes, standing like white fire in the sun, and blow them over the child in a thin cloud; or, again, a flight of little birds all blown sideways past would send her flying after them. But most of all she seemed delighted when the dandelion down enveloped her and blew away. Then she would grasp at it with her tiny white hands, springing upwards in the air and laughing. It was a sight so beautiful that I could have watched her all the day.

Suddenly she came with both hands full of yellow flowers, and flung them over old Mary's shoulders into her apron; and Mary, looking up with wide, dreamy eyes, encountered Conal's look, and mine.

"God and the Virgin be with you!" she greeted us tremulously.

"God save you, Mary! How is it with all here?"

Conal had walked to the gate and stood with the wind playing in his silvery hair, his hat pressed against him, as if he were in church. Mary smiled at him peacefully. "It is well with all here," she said, in her low, level voice. "As you will be seein', Conal, good neighbour."

I looked across his shoulder, smiling at her, and it seemed to me the little field was overgrown with flowers of golden and silver fire—lambent, radiant in the glorious day, and she was some peaceful

matured spirit with a child-angel playing round her.

The child laughed in her flight, and called as I stood—and Mary's smile was lovely in its happy sweetness.

Conal moved away, and I with him, and, looking back, I saw the child like some winged thing dancing tiptoe towards the old woman, laden again with flowers.

"It is a pity, Conal," said I, "that the children of the sea cannot come so far."

"An' why will that be, then?" he asked.

"Because," I replied, laughing at my own thought, "Mary's little granddaughter might well be mistaken for one of the foam-elves—she is so light on her bare feet and so pretty."

"Aye," said Conal quietly; "some have souls like the running water an' some like the green sea, and others have souls of pure fire—white an' fine—spirits of joy an' happiness; an' that's what Maureen ever was—" He paused on that, then spoke again—"an' will be ever."

A strange silence fell between us, and we went on as far as the bare grey stone house, where Conal left his web, without speaking any word. Then we turned and came homewards together. But at the little churchyard gate the grey ass came to a

stand-still, and Conal, with bent forefinger, asked me in. There, wending a reverent way between the green mounds, we came to one where he knelt down and pointed out a name. I stooped and read. It was a little grave below that stone, and every inch of it was covered thick with the golden and silver globes of dandelion, flower, and seed. I only read one line, "Maureen O'Hara, aged seven." Then I knew that I had seen a mystery. An old lonely woman sitting in a little field, watching a golden-haired child fly after the dandelion mist.

"I will be tellin' you this, machree," said Conal, "because you will not have to be speakin' of all you see to every one. For it is not good that every one should know. Maureen loved the feoghdawn—many a time have I seen her playin' in the bawn with her old granny, as we did to-day; the flower or the seed—she loved them both. She would be makin' garlands of them for Mary, who stands in the best room in her shrine, or tellin' the time on them like the Good People; blowing with the little pink mouth of her. Some souls are joy incarnate an' holy purity. She was the joy an' the light of Mary's days; so tender, so pure. How could God Almighty say 'No' if she yearned to come back an' comfort the lone old woman in the little house there? Who knows better nor the Mother of our Lord the ache

an' the bitterness of the vacant place? Small wonder that they will be lettin' her slip out an' play among the feoghdawn! Mary is happy now, machree."

"Very happy, Conal." He nodded gravely, and, bending down, smoothed the thick, warm blossoms with his hand. "'Tis a good herb—the feoghdawn," he said dreamily; "they knew it well in the old times. The beauty of it is good for the eye, an' the birds love the seed of it; of the leaves it is good for the heart of man. But of the root it is given for man alone to drink; an' the bitterness of it will be good for the soul. The Old Wisdom knew its virtues, for it cleared the soul's vision. It is exceedingly bitter in the mouth; but he who quaffs that bitter draught may call aloud, and the one he calls will say, 'Ecce ego!'"

And as we passed again the little field we saw them still at play. Conal walked with bare head by the grey ass, and I, looking in, saw, as it were, a wilderness of flowers, yellow and pure white fire standing on a field of vert, and in their midst—two angel shapes at play.

LIBAN OF THE WAVE

THIS is an ancient trouble of my race, that it is akin to the sea and those that dwell in it, that we know no lasting peace or content, because we ever seek the unattainable. The thing that is not now, but was, and will be again, and is never for us. Ours being the wild unrest, the tumult and joy, and swift rush and retreat of the wave. And under all its times of sunshine, its light and colour and rejoicing, its song and fury and wild rages, its smiling and calm, the ineffable melancholy of boundless knowledge. The knowledge that cannot be spoken or uttered, because it is the thought of the hidden soul, the secret vision looking through Fata Morgana to the bare rock, the barren headland, white with the drifting foam.

To many of us Fiontuin has spoken in the dusk; he comes with sandals of deerskin laced with gold, silent-footed in the twilight, and speaks strange things into the listening ear—beautiful Fiontuin who had seen the Deluge, who followed Christ, who mocked Ossian, who remembers the forgotten secrets of all time.

This is a tale he told me once long ago, with the murmur of the ocean in my ears and the sound of the wild bee seeking in the heather. Below Ben Bulbin it was, where once Dermot and Grannie fled together through the dews, with Fion hard behind. A long time back that seemed to me. Grey were their beds in the sunlight, covered with the rime of endless age; but to Fiontuin but a little while, as it were but yesterday as he wandered from Tir-na-Oge.

Many men have loved among the Deathless People, the Hidden Race whose beauty is unforgettable. Fion loved a princess of the Shee; Ossian, his son, born under enchantment, also loved an Immortal; at the last he remembered her kisses as sweeter than wine, and, blind and old, lamented her loss till the end.

In the old times gone past men loved the Immortals to their own undoing; no lasting happiness comes of mating thus, but only misery to the one who is mortal. The other must weary of the finite life, the slowly departing youth and beauty, understanding it not, because youth and beauty are theirs for ever who cannot die.

And the beauty of the Fairy Folk is like the beauty of the sea, terrible and compelling, as their love is changeful as the tides, now ebbing, now flowing to the moon. They count change as

faithlessness who have all the ages in which to be. They break hearts with a smile who cannot comprehend human woe or misery, who cannot suffer or sorrow or know regret, as ignorant of longing as the foam on the running wave.

These things Fiontuin told me of with a laugh, for he himself, though living on, and till the end, was once mortal; and remembers, though he has forgotten its keenness, the pang of useless yearning for what is gone.

It was on a morning of April, joy of the spring, when Nature is running over with happiness, the rapturous happiness of returning youth. A great wind blew from the south-west, casting up long green billows on the strand, where all the flowers that blow in Eire grew to the verge of the sea. A morning in which the heart sang, and age was forgot; in which no man might remember aught save that he was alive and the world was young again, with a blue sky overhead, where the wind chased the little snowy clouds down to the horizon edge, and the ocean was purple in its depths, green in its breaking, white-tipped as with the feathers of the wild swan.

So Cuan O'Lochain, Chief Bard of Erin, came riding along the shore, and found there a fisherman dragging in his nets behind his boat, after being out all the night.

"You will be having a great catch," said Cuan O'Lochain, in a voice that was sweet as the sound of wind in the high elms, or a harp played softly in the dark by one whose heart breaks.

"Stay," said the fisherman, who was Bedan, son of Innle, fisherman of Comgall, of Bennchair, and the strand where he drew his nets was Ollarbha, "stay and see what I may bring to land, Honey-Tongue"—for thus the people called Cuan O'Lochain. Cuan sat still on his horse, and Bedan drew in his nets, and they lay high on the yellow sands. No fish lay entangled in their meshes, or little shell, or drifting brown seaweed, but a woman whiter than the wild swans who cried overhead on their flight oceanwards, or the foam on the running wave, or the snow as it falls on pear and plum blossom in the early spring. White to perfection was every part of her that showed through the tangle of her hair, yellow as the rag-weed flowers, brown in its wetness as the ribbed sea-sand on which she lay.

At the sight of that wonder Cuan O'Lochain dismounted and bent over her, devouring her beauty with sad eyes, thinking her dead. The sea sang gaily below him as he looked. The April sun shone on her, the sweet winds drove across the chanting waves, and the larks sang overhead in the blueness. Love came into his heart for the fair, still woman.

He loosed the golden clasps of his blue mantle and wrapped her about, lifting her to the saddle. There the fisherman held her till Cuan mounted and rode away.

"I will be thinking that fair one is like Sin, the fairy-woman who caused the battle of Seghais," said he; but he told no man, and went his way.

For all the long miles to his home the woman made no motion of life. Not a tremble of her long lashes as her head lay on Cuan O'Lochain's breast, no stir of her white bosom with breath. He thought her dead, yet all his soul had gone out to her, mourning in love while he held her in his arms.

Lightly he carried her into the hall of his home; but when he reached the threshold of his mother's door the weight of her bowed his chest to his knee, so that he paused on the thrice-blessed step, holding her to him, her yellow hair sweeping the floor.

"Who is it you are bringing me from the sea?" asked Dervolga, his mother, rising from among her maids. "Is it a wife you carry home, Cuan, son of my love?"

"As it may be, mother," replied he; and with a great effort he lifted over and stood in the room, and she lay light as the sea-foam in his arms again, with the life-pulse slowly throbbing to his own.

He laid her on the settle by the turf-fire, and

wonderful was her beauty as she opened her eyes, blue as the bog-flax in his native bogs. And she smiled on him as a woman smiles on the lover of her dreams, so that his head sank on her bosom.

When Dervolga saw that look and his kiss, she withdrew her maidens and went forth. "Bitter, bitter are the gifts of the Sea-Lord," she wept, "and great bitterness to me is this thing, for this woman is of the Shee, and evil will she bring on my son and all that is his."

Little did Cuan O'Lochain know of her departure, for all his being was submerged in love for the fair white woman; with her he lived three months of supreme happiness and joy, forgetting all his songs and his place at the king's right hand. And on the morning of the fourth month, Dermot MacCarrol passed by with a hosting to meet Hugh Dubh, and took him with the beauty of the world in his possession. Cruel was Dermot, black was his nature, his heart full of evil. He put Cuan to the torture, that he might force him to give up his wife. But Cuan had ever one answer: "Rather would I ransom her from the Power of Evil, with my own soul."

Then Dermot put her in a strong tower, and blinded Cuan, tortured him with fire, and broke his legs below the knee. Then said he, "I will marry

her, Cuan O'Lochain, and you will not see, or move to prevent me."

All that night Cuan O'Lochain lay in manacles, chained to the tower by the sea, and the winds swept over him singing, the curlews cried, and the wild swans sang on their homeward flight. All night long the little waves whispered to him, calling, chiming, singing, and his heart bursting with the vain desire for his fair love. In the morning, when the level sunrays lit the sands with the flood-tide lipping the green shore, Dermot went to the tower and called the woman forth; but all that he saw in the little room where he had prisoned her was the image of a wave that swept like a shadow across the stone floor, and a wift of white foam that blinded his eyes for the moment and was gone.

"Cuan O'Lochain!" cried Dermot. "Where is the beautiful woman?"

And, said Cuan, with a laugh in his heart and joy in his voice: "Ask me, O King, where is Liban, the daughter of Eochaidh MacMuiredha. Where is the wave that passed out to sea? Where is the racing billow? the glint of sunshine under the green walls of Tir-na-Thuin?"

Then Dermot, fearing the curse that the Chief Bard might put upon him, set Cuan free, and left him there in the loneliness and silence by the old stone

tower. Many a year till he grew old he dwelt there, and made many songs on his Shee wife. Many, many days and long nights, in calm and moonlight, in storm and tempest and rain, in mist and drifting fogs, and under sun and moon, he sought her till the end.

In his heart was all the wild unrest, the perpetual motion of the changing tides. He knew no peace, no comfort was his, no content. Blind, crippled, and broken, he called upon the love of his youth, till the snows of age were thick on his head. Then, on a night in April, when the moon shone brightly, and the great south-east wind blew roaring over Erin, came a flood-tide greater than any man had ever known. It came without sound up the shore, lapping gently to the spring flowers, covering the greenness of the grass with its own greenness, in one enormous high wave, in which were soft whisperings and low music, and the voice of a woman calling sweet, as a girl calls to her lover through the dusk. And when it went Cuan was no longer. It had taken with it the homeless wave in his heart, the longing, the seeking, the flame of love that consumed him always. Whither it took him no man can tell. But Fiontuin smiled when I asked him if Cuan O'Lochain was not also in Tir-na-Oge, singing songs to the white loveliness of Liban, daughter of the sea, and the flying wave.

SAMHAIN

THIS is a story Conal told me in the misty gloaming of a November eve. The shadows pressed against the narrow casements all the while, or wavered, furtive and vague, across the thrice-blessed threshold, as if listening to a tale they knew. I had glanced up the wide, white road ascending from the level boglands to the little old church perched on the hill, and seen it thronged with vague shapes, nebulous and indistinct—now melting into the drifting murk, now vaporous white. The dead hastening to their old haunts for that brief interval between sun and sun which is theirs on All Souls'. Conal's door was set wide, his earthen floor swept clean, the quaint china on the black oak dresser reflecting the light of the great turf fire piled high on the wide hearth. Facing its crimson glow were four of the rush-bottomed chairs that usually stood round the gate table where Conal ate his simple meals. His dreamy eyes met mine, and he answered the unspoken question. "Nay," he said quietly. "Shan would always be in the corner of the suttle there, with the neighbours' children at his knee."

He nodded across the fire at the old settle, polished to a mirror-like brightness by contact with long generations passed away, then pulled out a four-legged stool and mutely invited me to sit by him in the corner of the cavernous chimney. His house was swept and garnished for a more honoured company than mine. Conal was waiting in the firelight for his five dead sons. They would drift in and sit in their accustomed seats, and silently, invisibly drift away again. But Conal would know their presence and be glad. I sat down beside him and thought of my walk under the sombre sky across the lonely bog, with its deep cuttings brimming with wan, white water, and the strange thing I had seen on the wind-swept waste, with the plover's cry in my ears. Conal, with the strange perception that was his, must have divined my wonder. "Did you meet e'er a one coming across the bog?" he asked. "Yes," I said, "I met one burdened with age and sorrow, whose eyes I cannot forget." Conal bent towards me sideways in his bee-hive chair, his fine fingers outspread on his knee. "Aroon," he whispered, "were they your own?" And the strange thing was that the eyes I could not forget were my own eyes, and the face was my own face, worn and pale with great sorrow.

He nodded silently at the leaping flame. "None but the blood of Hy Neill will ever be seeing that

thing," he said, "and do not fear, for it is only a warning of what need not come. It is for a remembrance, machree, and no harm need come of it. I will tell you of how it came to the Hy Neill. Sit now, and do not be feared. It will be a long while back, in a time that no one will be remembering now —before the untamed Pagan hordes came to the sweet, wide plains and grassy hills of Erin, when Lughaird was Ard Ri-Lughaird, who was gracious and noble, high-born and beautiful; who submitted to no tyranny or oppression from any in the world, and from him are descended the Dal Cais, who till this day have never been bought with money, place, or power to do the thing that is wrong. So in his life was this King of Banba, but he had the great failing. Like that young man whom the Lord loved, he could not give up his pleasures, and for pleasure and conquest he lived, and that led to evil beyond telling, and almost cost him his soul. All women love the brave and fearless, and Lughaird was the flower of manhood, the delight of all the world. No woman ever looked on him that did not love him in her heart. And he loved them all—for a season. A week, maybe a month—but then forgot them in his fierce valour and great joy in battle. Fair, strange women followed his footsteps weeping, but he hated tears and sighs, and loved laughter, till he came to thirty years of age,

and had been crowned King of all Ireland for five years. A tall, great hero, smiling, fair, and straight-featured, with the nose high between his black brows, as all the Danan have, and eyes that were black in their blueness. Shapely and splendid, with a voice like the harping of Ossian, and a heart impervious as the grey steel. On this day of his life there met him two women he loved. One was his sister Crède of the Yellow Hair, that was born with him, and who was so gifted by God that His love shone through her as the sunlight streams through the thin porcelain, and was so worn with prayers and fastings that the wind lifted her when it blew. When he met her he was ashamed, remembering his sins; but Crède spoke not of them at all on that day. Only laid an oath upon him, that when she called he would come, whatever company he might be in; and he promised, and she went away, though none saw her go. Now the source of Lughaird's evil life was in a Pagan woman, Ota, who was cruelty and mystery that none could fathom. More beautiful than heaven, more terrible than hell, a proud, pale woman, full of passionless lust for blood and wealth, stained from her white feet to her neck of snow with the evil she had done; and of her Lughaird never wearied, for he knew she did not love him. But she had cast a glamour over him that none could break. That night, as they sat together

at the feast, Crède made a compact with God that He would take the years of her life as the price of her brother's soul, that he might be delivered from the Pagan woman. And that same was accepted quickly, and even as she prayed there was the sound of a galloping horse, and the King was by her. And when Crède saw him in all his splendour and beauty, with the flush of wine on his firm cheeks and the light of revelry in his eyes, she held out her hands to him in agony lest he would be lost; and holding his hands in hers, she sank down on her couch and died. Then Lughaird straightened her limbs, and sat at her side mourning her. Now there was before Christ came a great Feast of the Dead in Erin, called Samhain, and on it all the Dead returned, from the rise of the moon till it set, even as they do now. And as he sat, all the women who had died for Lughaird, beginning with his mother, passed through the dead nun's cell and looked down on the King with sorrowful eyes. Without cry or motion in an icy air, the souls of these women passed in and away, and there was no sound at all in the dim night save the call of the plover, or the drumming of the snipe, and the echo of faint sighs from beyond the grave. And no light save the blessed candle above Crède's yellow tresses. At midnight he stooped to kiss her on the cold pure lips, and said, "Farewell! Crède, it is too late! else

had my heart broken this night. I am content with the pleasures of earth—I ask no better Paradise."

Now the nun's cell was built with the door towards the sea, and when he looked out across her straight bed he saw Ocean on the flow, with the Samhain moon red as copper, dull on its outer verge. And coming up from the white sands the figure of a man, old and stooping, who crept slowly on his staff towards the door and entered it. At the sight of that man the King's knees smote together, the coldness of fear gripped his heart and tightened his breath. For long the old man stood over the dead nun, till at last Lughaird spoke, and his voice was not his own. "Who art thou that wearest my crown?" And at that word the old man lifted his face. He was bent, and straightened himself; and though no man in Erin was tall as the King, this man was as tall. "Aye!" he mocked, "Lughaird, son of Lornach, who am I?"

Lughaird looked on the face and went back one pace—for it was his own. Bloated and leering and crimson, a face that had looked on hell, and remembered the grave, worn with iniquity, weary with wrong-doing, filled with a ceaseless rage against God and man, proud and merciless, more cruel than the tiger, unrepentant as the Evil One. For every line was a ruined grace.

Then Lughaird gazed at the holy purity of the dead nun, and cried aloud, "Uch! Uch! Jesus! Mary! What shall I do?" And a wind that was not of this world caught the old man's scarlet cloak and covered him from view. It was as if he had been suddenly carried from hell on that wind and suddenly caught back on it again.

But the remembrance of that face that was his own never departed from Lughaird from that time till he came to his end. And as his sins had been great, so was his bitter repentance while the breath was in him, and it is written in many a book how just and upright he became. For the power of the evil that held him was broken by the sight of his own soul irrevocably damned, and no other sight would have saved him. But if it were the answer to Crède's sacrifice, or the powers of Pagan darkness, can any tell? Whist! That will be Shan stepping over the threshold. Look how the turf ash flies!

THE END

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